Emo twink stepbrother rides jock! XXX **scheduled for deletion**

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by raventia

Summary

Till’s world is turned upside down when he finds gay porn in Ivan's browser history. Gay stepbrother porn, specifically. Till isn’t exactly having a great week.

It’s fucking Ivan. He can’t be gay. He can’t be… It’s just a coincidence. Till is coincidentally his stepbrother, and Ivan is coincidentally into gay stepbrother porn. Just because Ivan likes this messed up shit doesn’t mean he feels that way toward Till.

But most of the videos lean toward emo twinks. Ones who wear too much eyeliner, none of them rocking it nearly as good as Till.

It’s a small victory to be better looking than these gay twink pornstars. Till wishes he had the energy to appreciate it more.

Chapter 1

Ivan enters Till's life at the ripe age of nine, and it's been hell ever since.

They're stepbrothers, technically. *Technically.* Because Ivan's bastard father married Till's mom – Io – and somehow, Till was cursed with an older brother.

Then, tragedy struck. Ivan's father couldn't even make it through his first year of marriage before dying spontaneously of a heart attack at his law firm. Some sort of major blockage. They called it a widowmaker heart attack, and it did just that. It made Io a widow approximately one year after exchanging her vows with the guy.

Rest in peace, bastard. You will not be missed. Io cried for *months*.

Still, it worked out well. Io was cut a hefty life insurance check, as well as the substantial sum of money Ivan's father left behind.

Unfortunately, there was the Ivan Problem – the fact that Ivan was only twelve and had no relatives to take him in. Well, besides Io, who couldn't part with Ivan even if she tried. She *loves* Ivan. Neat, athletic, sociable Ivan. Everything a kid should be, at least when no one was looking.

And Till was the only one who saw him for what he was – a freak, one who hid it under a thick coating of princely polish. But Till didn't see it at first, not when they were kids, not when he didn't know any better.

At first, Ivan was normal. His blank stare locked onto Till the moment they were introduced, almost calculating. He was eleven, Till was nine, and that was it. They played and fought like any other pair of kids, except Ivan was weird about it. He didn't play with anyone else, and he didn't let Till, either. He was *clingy.*

"Till, you can't play with him. You can't. You have to play with me."

And Till didn't like being told what to do. So, they started fighting more than playing – "I don't want to play with you anymore, you're *mean* and *weird!*" – but that came to an end when Ivan's bastard father kicked the bucket.

Something about Ivan changed. It was like he aged an entire decade between the ages of twelve and thirteen. He helped Io around the house, focused on his schoolwork, and he didn't play with Till anymore. Didn't follow him around, didn't glare at other kids when they approached him.

And no, ten year old Till didn't miss it. He didn't cry big fat tears and beg Ivan to throw the ball with him, *please,* just for fifteen minutes. He definitely didn't cry harder when Ivan said no, stating that his older, cooler friends were more fun to play with because they could at least catch the ball.

They get along better now, or so Io says. Ivan has grown into the school heart throb, the star quarterback who took Anakt Garden – the stupidest name for a school Till has ever heard of – to the playoffs. He's at the top of his class and gets along with everyone. On track to go to some Ivy League school miles and miles away from their hometown.

He's popular, is what Till is trying to say.

And Till… is 'figuring things out,' according to his mom. He paints his nails. Wears dark and ratty clothes that sometimes reveal too much. He has a temper and a foul mouth that earns him detention at least once a week, and he holes up in his room to sing and play guitar instead of doing his homework.

All in all, they're polar opposites.

Yet, here they are. After ignoring Till for, like, five straight years, Ivan's gone back to being his usual freak self these days. It's been that way for a little over a year now, and Till is still coming to terms with it.

"Why the fuck are you sitting with me?" Till asks for the third time.

Ivan is idly picking at his breakfast wrap. "You don't have any friends, do you?"

"What?" Till hisses. There are approximately fourteen people staring at them, because a popular jock sitting with an emo delinquent is apparently the most interesting thing to ever happen to the cafeteria. "Where the fuck did that come from?"

"Well," Ivan says mildly, still pulling his wrap apart like some kind of psychopath instead of eating it. "You sit alone every day. Doesn't that make you feel like a loser?"

Till narrows his eyes. Takes a deep breath. Lets it out, slowly. "You have five seconds to remove yourself from my presence before I throw the first punch."

Till's already unpopular. Breaking the school heart throb's perfect nose would probably make him the target of a lot of vandalism on his locker, but he can just draw over it. Io certainly won't be happy with him, but Till's defense has always been, 'He started it.'

"Please don't." Ivan finally finds what he's looking for in his breakfast wrap – a piece of bacon that he pops into his mouth, which also coincidentally makes a girl two tables over swoon dramatically. "I thought you'd appreciate some company after Mizi rejected you this morning."

Till's heart freezes to ice. "H-How did you hear about that?"

Ivan fake smiles. It never reaches his eyes, fucking freak. "On the grapevine. You managed to make a wave. A small wave, granted, but I still would like to congratulate you."

"You're so full of shit," Till manages. His head is still reeling from the knowledge that most of the school probably knows at this point and is laughing at him. "I just… shot my shot. There's nothing wrong with that."

Ivan hums. “She’s a lesbian, Till.”

Till glares at the table. His own sandwich – which Ivan packed for him, since Io was busy – is getting soggy from all the ketchup he used to make it edible. “How was I supposed to know?”

“Somewhere between Mizi’s third or fourth tongue-kiss with Sua, I’d imagine,” Ivan replies helpfully. “Are you going to cry? I have a tissue in case your eyeliner runs.”

“Fuck off,” Till mutters, scrubbing the wetness from his eyes with the back of his hand. It leaves a dark smear, but Till still has yesterday’s sharpie doodle covering his skin, so it isn’t too noticeable. “Leave me alone.”

“There, there.” Ivan reaches into his varsity jacket pocket and pulls out a neatly folded tissue, like this entire conversation was premeditated and destined to end in Till crying. “Let me see, Till.”

It’s so stupid. So, so fucking stupid how Ivan’s tone is all soothing and nice, how everyone is watching them like Ivan is a kind older brother taking care of his loser sibling after said sibling got rejected, when Ivan is literally incapable of sympathy. Till’s just surprised he isn’t recording this on his phone.

Ivan grips Till’s chin and forces him to lift his head. Till glares at him through a sea of wet, angry tears, tinged black from his eyeliner. Then, perfectly casual, Ivan begins the careful and painstaking task of dabbing Till’s tears away while also cleaning up the makeup stains.

The same way someone might scrub at their rat dog’s eye boogers. Sweet, indulgent, as if it’s an everyday occurrence.

Till does not sniffle, and he does not allow Ivan to wipe away his snot. Except that he does. “I fucking hate you.”

“If hating me makes you feel better,” Ivan begins, examining Till’s face until he finally deems him clean, “Then by all means, hate me. Also, you should eat your sandwich. I made it with love.”

“What,” Till breathes, eyes wide because he *ate* a few bites already, “did you do to it?”

Ivan blinks innocently. “Turkey, cheese, whole-grain bread, and a few –” Till’s heart genuinely stops beating until he hears the rest, “ – Pickles.”

After that, one of Ivan’s popular jock friends shows up and asks him what he’s doing talking to a loser like Till, and Ivan’s fake smile grates on Till more than usual as the two walk away.

Till has ceramics with Ivan this semester.

He’s also fifty percent sure that it’s some sort of divine punishment. Ivan is a senior, so he needs one last art credit to graduate and be sent off to his fancy ivy league school. As a

sophomore, Till had signed up for every art class he could, and somehow, that ended with taking a ceramics class with Ivan.

“God, you suck at this,” Till groans, shoving Ivan aside so he can wedge the clay himself.

Ivan’s genuine smile is all snaggletooth, and Till hates how he knows that. “How so? I was doing it right this time.”

“Yeah, if you’re fucking geriatric or something,” Till replies, a little breathless.

“Ah. You said I used too much force yesterday, so –”

“You almost broke the table, dumbass.”

“Language, Till,” says their art teacher from her desk, idly reading a magazine. “Three more swears and you’re in detention again. You know the rules.”

Till has been allowed five swears a day, which isn’t close to enough when your ceramics partner is fucking Ivan. In light of this, he thinks he should be given at least twenty more.

Ceramics is their last period of the day, and with only a handful of students in the class, Ivan’s… Ivanisms are dialed up to the nth degree. He hovers and follows Till around everywhere, leaning his hip on the table, shallowly apologizing when he accidentally bumps Till when he’s glazing something. Once, he plucked a hair from Till’s head and kneaded it into his clay, saying that he’d cherish it forever.

(Thankfully, Ivan’s project exploded in the kiln. Till may or may not have sabotaged him).

“I’ll help you wedge your clay, Ivan,” a girl says, deciding to appear out of thin air.

Or, at least it *feels* that way. Till shrieks and nearly sends the mass of clay flying at her face, but Ivan reacts faster and catches it before it can. Do quarterbacks catch? Till doesn’t know shit about football. The reaction time is kind of terrifying, though.

“S-Sorry,” the girl says, shaken by Till’s outburst. “I just thought Ivan needed help.”

Ivan’s fake smile is so slimy and disgusting, Till has to look away. None the wiser, Ivan crosses his arms and seems to think it over. “Sena, right?”

The girl’s eyes light up, and Till goes *eugh* under his breath, still wedging. A piece of nail polish chips off his finger into the clay.

“Oh! I didn’t think you’d remember. We had economics last year.”

“I remember. You wore a braid,” Ivan says.

“Ponytail,” Sena corrects, still starry-eyed. “It was a long time ago.”

“Yeah, a whole year,” Till mutters under his breath. If he asked right now, Ivan could probably say what Till wore on the second Tuesday of last month. The dude’s memory is as

freakish as his personality, so he must be fucking with this girl on purpose. God, he's so slimy. "Take him away. He's fucking hopeless."

"Two more, Till," monotones the teacher from her desk, turning her page.

It takes everything Till has to stop himself from flipping her off. He doesn't know where that would get him. Suspension, probably. Ivan would never let him live it down.

Sena is still hopefully gazing at Ivan. "So, what do you say? Partners?"

"Actually, I'd prefer to work with my brother," Ivan replies, and Till freezes up.

That's not part of Ivan's script. Ivan is supposed to say, 'That sounds wonderful. I'm sure my grade is safe in your hands' and the girl will say, 'Please take my virginity and don't wear a condom.' And Till will still be here, wedging this fucking clay, while Ivan raises the teenage pregnancy statistics.

(Except that isn't quite true. Ivan's never brought a girl home, and he's too smart to have unprotected sex. Fucking barf. Till hates this train of thought).

Sena's lower lip wobbles. "I understand. He probably needs your support right now. I'll, uhm, leave now. Excuse me."

"What the fuck, who said I need support?" Till asks once she's out of earshot, ignoring the teacher's sharp glare. He's one swear away from detention again, but whatever. "And since when do you call me brother?"

Ivan used to say it all the time when they were kids to anyone who would listen. *Till is my brother. I only have one brother, and it's Till. He's important to me because he's my brother. He can only play with me, his brother. Isn't my brother cute? Stop following my brother around. My brother doesn't like you.*

They aren't even real brothers. Not a drop of Ivan's mutated, freak DNA is shared with Till, thank god.

"Mizi rejected you, and we *are* stepbrothers," Ivan reminds him, peering over Till's shoulder to watch him work the clay. "Is that a piece of your nail polish?"

Till hurriedly kneads the black chip out of sight. "No."

"Don't do that," Ivan chides, frowning. "I want a piece of clay with the essence of Till."

"You're a sicko," Till accuses, elbowing Ivan hard in the ribs before he can get any closer. "You want my essence? I'll spit in your water bottle before practice."

Ivan looks way too excited at the threat, tanking Till's bony elbow without complaint as his eyes widen gleefully. "Promise?"

Till genuinely can't believe him sometimes. He's such a freak. "You need to be institutionalized."

“High school is the same thing.” Ivan is quiet for a long moment, and just as Till finally finishes wedging the clay so it won’t explode in the kiln, Ivan says, “If you do decide to spit in my water bottle, can you make sure it has some phlegm? The kind that’s mostly mucus, you have to hack it up from the back of your throat –”

Till doesn’t wheeze, but it’s close. “Get the fuck away from me, you freak of nature.”

The teacher, who must have heard the entire conversation, decides the most important one to reprimand between the two of them is Till and his colorful language.

“Detention, Till. I’ll see you after school.”

“Seriously?” Till asks, pursing his lips when he sees Ivan’s stupid snaggletooth smile. He doesn’t ask the teacher if she’s selectively deaf, because he’s pretty sure that would land him detention all week.

“I’ll pick you up after football practice,” Ivan says, like the phlegm thing was a ploy to get Till into his car and drive him home. It probably was.

At least, Till hopes so.

After an hour and a half of organizing the crafts room, Till is allowed to leave. Part of him wants to spite Ivan and just walk home, but he’s already so fucking done with this day, and he just doesn’t have the energy. He walks to the student parking lot and bums a cigarette from a few stragglers, then settles into Ivan’s car.

It was a seventeenth birthday present from Io. Black as night, only a few years old with good mileage. As far as first cars go, it’s practically a Lamborghini. It doesn’t smell faintly of vomit or cigarettes or animals, doesn’t have problems with heating or AC.

Ivan has one of those little hula girl bobble heads on the dashboard – glued there by the previous owner – but there aren’t many signs of life. No one would guess a teenager drives Ivan’s car.

All in all, he’s a psychopath.

Practice runs late, so Till waits in Ivan’s car while Ivan is busy getting tackled and concussed and yelled at by a man having a midlife crisis. He pulls out his headphones and sketchbook while he waits, doodling instead of doing his homework like he probably should.

Till needs to get his own license and car, but driving is kind of terrifying. He’ll hold off for now. It’s not like he has a lot of friends to drive around or places to be, other than his guitar lessons every Wednesday.

Suddenly, he remembers what Ivan said during lunch: *doesn’t that make you feel like a loser?*

Fuck Ivan. Fuck his stupid, ghostly voice echoing in Till’s ears. He doesn’t need friends. And he’s not a *loser.* Mizi talked to him twice this week before his dumb confession, and he likes being alone anyway. It’s probably Ivan’s fault somehow.

Speaking of Ivan. Till looks up and sees the team leaving the field. Of course, Ivan is the center of attention with his fake slimy smile, chatting casually like he hasn't made Till wait an extra thirty minutes. Annoyed, Till sinks down in the passenger seat so Ivan's meathead teammates won't see him.

The car door opens and closes. Ivan sets the keys onto the center console, then pauses, nose twitching. "Till. You were smoking again."

"It's actually none of your fucking business," Till replies, managing to sink deeper into his seat.

Ivan is weird about a lot of things, but he's especially weird about Till's smoking habits. And it isn't like Till is addicted and smoking a pack a day. Only a few a week. Barely. After Mizi's rejection and Ivan's ivanism, Till thinks he's earned himself a cigarette today.

Ivan doesn't let a lot of genuine emotion show on his face, but if there's one thing that's sure to piss him off, it's Till smoking. Till watches Ivan's eyebrow twitch minutely. It's kind of fascinating, in a weird, grim way. A part of Till preens at the knowledge that only he can get under Ivan's skin after all this time.

"You're my brother. Of course it's my business," Ivan says, tone clipped. His wet hair drips down his neck, freshly showered, and Till is momentarily distracted when a water droplet runs a rivulet down Ivan's throat.

Again with the brother thing. Till crosses his arms and glares at the hula girl bobble head. "Can you just start the car?"

Ivan does not. "Buckle your seatbelt."

"Or what?" Till asks, arguing for the sake of arguing. "If you crash and I die, then it's your fault. Have fun showering in my blood and guts."

"Till." Ivan's tone is bone-chillingly serious all of a sudden, and it gives Till goosebumps. He levels Till with a flat, void-eyed stare. "Don't joke about that."

Unconsciously, Till shrinks back. Normal Ivan would have said something like, I bet your blood and guts are so warm. Probably. There's also a chance that Normal Ivan would get just as pissy about Till's flippant attitude toward death as Weird Ivan. Maybe Till is the one full of shit right now.

Till just doesn't understand why Ivan cares. About smoking, about buckling his seatbelt. The guy was gleefully wiping Till's tears away during lunch, and now he's pissed because Till cracked a joke about dying.

"Fine," Till hisses, buckling his seatbelt and making a 'ta-da!' gesture with his hand. Don't tell anyone, but Ivan fucking scares him sometimes. "Your noble and pure body is safe from my rotten, delinquent viscera."

Ivan doesn't look particularly happy to hear about Till's delinquent viscera, but he does press the button to start the car. The drive home is awkward and tense, and Till immediately escapes to his room before Ivan forces him to do his homework.

Once he's safely locked the door behind him, Till cries into his pillow for the next hour. He knew he'd have no chance with Mizi even if she wasn't a lesbian, but it still fucking sucks. He's had a crush on her since sixth grade.

Eventually, Io knocks on his door. Then, Till cries into his mom's shoulder for another thirty minutes while she strokes his back soothingly. Ivan is nowhere to be seen, thank god, but that's probably because Io told him to give Till some space. Otherwise, he'd be planted right at the doorway to Till's room, watching.

Dinner is a miserable experience. Till's eyeliner is smudged all over his face, but here he is, sitting at the table while Ivan chats with Io. Till stabs his chicken with his fork until it's practically shredded, and then he moves onto his potatoes, which are already mashed, so it isn't nearly as satisfying.

After dinner, Io suggests they all watch a movie together to cheer him up. Till's always had a soft spot for his mom, so now he's sitting on the couch with Ivan in the dark while Io makes popcorn in the kitchen, leaving the two of them together. It may as well be an eternity, because Ivan is insufferable today.

"It's not a big deal, Till," Ivan is saying, arranging the blanket so it covers them both. "Mizi's not into you, but she's not into any guy. You're not special."

Till glares at him, angrily wiping the smudged eyeliner away with his sleeve. "Shut up, Ivan."

Ivan obviously doesn't listen, because when has he ever? "Do you want to cry on my shoulder too?"

Till laughs bitterly. "And what if I did?"

"I'd never wash this shirt again," Ivan replies without missing a beat. "Make sure you really soak your mucus and tears into the fabric, though. You have to make it worth it. It's one of my favorites."

It's an old T-shirt from when Ivan and Till went to camp together three years ago. Ivan had the time of his life, while Till spent most of the week moping in bed. Well, until the last day when Ivan picked him up and threw him into the lake. He can still remember Ivan's wide, gleeful snaggletooth smile as they punched and kicked each other bloody in the water.

If Till didn't know Ivan for so long, he would have guessed Ivan caught some sort of brain eating amoeba in the lake. Unfortunately, Ivan's had ivanism his whole life. Very sad, especially for Till.

"What the fuck is up with you and my mucus?" Till asks.

Ivan opens his mouth, but Till hastily interrupts him.

“Don’t answer that. I don’t want to know.”

Ivan hums. “Your loss.”

The couch isn’t very big, and Ivan’s thigh is pressed right against Till’s. He can feel the heat radiating from Ivan – what is he, a furnace or something? – and it’s making Till’s skin crawl. Ivan’s leg looks so solid and muscular next to Till’s, which is as thin and bony as the rest of him.

Annoyed, Till places his hand on Ivan’s thigh under the blanket. He expects Ivan to get a little freaked out and move away, giving Till some much needed personal space. The only way to win against Ivan is to out-freak him. At least, that was the plan.

Till does *not* expect Ivan to stiffen under his touch, nor for his breath to hitch so abruptly and loudly. Ivan’s eyes widen, and the quad muscle under Till’s palm twitches. It takes Ivan a moment to speak.

“Till,” he whispers, “What are you doing?”

“Groping you,” Till replies, deadpan. He’s already committed, and this is clearly making Ivan uncomfortable, so he has to be winning, right?

Ivan takes a deep breath. He tips his head back to stare at the ceiling above them, and Till watches his throat bob around a swallow. “Please… don’t say it like that. That isn’t fair.”

Till’s never seen Ivan this… unraveled. And something about that compels Till to squeeze Ivan’s thigh *hard.*

Ivan makes a small noise in the back of his throat, stifled by the hand he places over his mouth. It’s something high-pitched and shuddery, like it was startled out of him. The sound is still reverberating in Till’s ears thirty seconds later.

“What the hell was that?” Till asks, staring at Ivan in incredulous disbelief. He didn’t know Ivan’s voice could go that high, holy shit.

Ivan doesn’t answer. He keeps his hand over his mouth, and his wide eyes dart toward Till like he’s trying to decide whether this is real life or some pathetic, embarrassing fever dream. His cheeks are pinker than Till can ever recall seeing them. What the hell.

“Ivan,” Till manages, literally speechless. His hand is still resting on Ivan’s thigh, but he’s too stunned to move it. “Did you just, like – whimper?”

Ivan clears his throat and smoothens his expression, subtly trying to shift his thigh away. “No, Till. You must be hearing things.”

“You definitely did,” Till replies. He tightens his grip on Ivan’s thigh again just to prove that he isn’t going crazy.

This time, Ivan’s whole body flinches, and he audibly groans, a low, stifled sound that he tries – and fails – to disguise as a cough. A vein is bulging on his forearm, and his hands are

fisted tight like he's exerting a great amount of restraint.

"Stop," Ivan says, strained.

Till's never had the upper-hand like this. Not when they were kids, and certainly not now that they're teenagers. There's only one explanation for Ivan's unusually freakish behavior, and that's –

"You're ticklish," Till accuses, empowered by the knowledge of Ivan's weakness. How did he go his whole life without realizing?

Ivan wheezes out an unhinged laugh. "Sure, Till. I'm ticklish."

His wry, manic tone is completely lost on Till, because this is the best thing that's ever happened to him. Ivan has a *weakness.* He doesn't get to reply though, because Io walks in with a fresh bowl of buttery popcorn. She happily settles between them and starts the movie while Ivan hogs the entire blanket, folding it over his lap. Jerk.

The movie is as boring as Till expected it to be. On screen, Jennifer Lawrence is bawling her eyes out. Alien invasion, maybe? Till wasn't paying attention. Ivan is still hunched over, keeping the blanket securely in place. Which is weird. Ivan doesn't get cold, like, ever.

Whatever.

After the movie is over, Till retreats to his room, strumming his guitar until he's certain everyone's asleep. Then, he jerks off in bed, annoyed when he realizes that he's out of tissues, so he wipes the mess up with a pair of boxers and calls it a day. He'll just have to remember to hide the evidence before Io does laundry.

Till does not remember to hide his suspiciously stiff boxers.

He wakes up, brushes his teeth, and eats a granola bar for breakfast. He allows Ivan to drive them to school after a quick shower, and Till goes about his entire day until he's in the middle of his guitar lesson. Then, it hits him.

"Fuck," he mutters. Poor Io. She's not going to judge him, but he loves his mom, and he'd rather not traumatize her.

Till's guitar teacher – Liz – a college student with a lot of piercings and dark makeup, looks up from her own jam session. She's really pretty, but she's not Mizi. "What's up, Till? Did you break a string?"

"No." Till is calculating how fast he can call Ivan to pick him up. Io usually does laundry at five, and it's already four thirty. "Just… forgot I had something to do. I've gotta bail."

"No problem," Liz says, shooting him a reserved smile that sends a little arrow through Till's heart. Damn hormones. "Same time next week?"

“Yeah,” Till replies, already fumbling to put his guitar in its case. He hesitates at the door to her apartment, oddly skittish. So what if he has a crush on a college girl four years his senior? “Uh. See you.”

Liz hums in response, already focused on tuning her guitar. She’s so cool. The exact opposite of Till, who has to race home in case his mom has to come in contact with his jizz-covered underwear. He shoots Ivan a text while he takes the elevator down.

Till (4:34): *NEED PICKUP NOW.*

Ivan’s response is immediate.

Ivan (4:34): *Emergency?*

Till glares at his phone screen, cracked and weathered from abuse. He grits his teeth and types out a response while he storms through the lobby, but he apparently took too long to answer, because his phone rings.

Ivan’s stupid face – a picture Till took after he drew on it while Ivan was sleeping – pops up. Till furiously flicks his thumb across the screen to answer. He opens his mouth, but Ivan beats him to the punch.

“Are you safe?” is somehow the first thing Ivan says, a little breathlessly.

“What?” Till asks, eyebrows furrowed. Not this stupid protective older brother schtick again. “Obviously.”

“Ah. That’s good.” A long, pregnant pause. “No kidnappers?” Ivan clarifies.

“What is your malfunction,” Till says flatly.

“Many things,” Ivan replies, sounding like his usual freak self. “If you want a list, I can prepare one for you. But I don’t think you want to know, Till.”

“I really don’t,” Till agrees, crossing his arms once he walks outside. It’s a cold November evening, and the sun is already setting. Fucking autumn. He can’t believe Ivan took the football team to the playoffs, so now he and Io have to endure this weather until Anakt gets eliminated. “Can you pick me up or not?”

“I can,” Ivan agrees easily. Less easily, he continues, “But you’ll have to tell me why you need to be picked up in the middle of your guitar lesson.”

“Maybe my teacher got handsy,” Till replies peevishly, unwilling to admit the truth, especially to Ivan. He’d never live it down.

“The lesbian?” Ivan asks, and Till’s heart stops.

“What.”

Ivan is given pause. “I thought you knew, Till. She has a septum piercing.”

“W-What does that have to do with it?” Till hisses, running a hand through his hair. How many lesbians is he going to crush on? His heart can’t handle this. Liz called his eyeliner cute last week. He thought she was flirting. Till’s world is ending.

“Don’t be upset. She was too old for you anyway,” Ivan soothes, which isn’t very soothing at all, because it’s a) Ivan, and b) his voice laced with smugness. “The offer to cry on my shoulder still stands.”

Till bites his lip in frustration. “Shut up, Ivan. I didn’t even like her that much.”

“You’re so tsundere,” Ivan says with a throaty, low laugh that sends a shiver down Till’s spine. It’s probably a coincidence. Till hopes the real cause is cancer. Then, he’ll die and he won’t have to worry about crushing on lesbians anymore.

“Stop pretending like you know what that means,” Till hisses. “You don’t even watch anime.”

“On the contrary, I watch plenty of Japanese media with tsundere characters.”

“Japanese media,” Till repeats, then winces. “Dude, gross. Don’t tell me what hentai you watch.”

“If you insist.” Ivan hums thoughtfully. “What about you?”

“What?”

Ivan’s tone is perfectly serious. He sounds a little too interested. “What hentai do you watch?”

“W-Why the fuck would I tell you that!?” Till wheezes.

“I told you what I watch. It’s only fair, Till.”

“I – I didn’t even want to know in the first place!” Till exclaims, glaring at a passerby until the woman finally walks away. “Can you just pick me up already?”

“Only if you tell me.”

Till heaves a frustrated growl. He glares at the concrete sidewalk for several seconds, wrestling with his pride. He needs to get home before Io finds his suspiciously stiff boxers. Any other day, he’d tell Ivan to fuck off and hang up, then walk home. But he doesn’t have time for that.

And so, Till holds the phone close to his mouth and looks around, before whispering into the speaker, “I don’t know. C-Cross-dressing, I guess.”

Ivan’s swift inhale carries over the line. Till can hear him swallow heavily. “The girl or the guy?” he asks after a long pause.

Till’s face feels warm. “T-That isn’t part of the deal. You said you’d pick me up if I told you.”

“Please, Till,” Ivan manages, breathing shakily into the receiver, “you have to tell me. You have to.”

What the fuck is even going on? This is freakish even for Ivan, and that’s *saying* something. The dude was just talking about Till’s phlegm yesterday during ceramics class.

Till scuffs the tip of his sneaker into the concrete. He could lie, but Ivan always knows when he isn’t telling the truth. So, Till tries to fight his blush as he whispers, “The… The guy, alright? A-And the girl calls him cute, or, or whatever.” He releases a deeply embarrassed sigh. “Happy?”

Silence.

“I’m going to crash the car,” Ivan declares abruptly, making Till sputter.

“What?! Pay attention to the road, you fucking freak!” Wait. Till’s eyes widen. “Were you on your way this whole fucking time?”

“I think,” Ivan replies, sounding dazed. “The last five minutes are hazy. On a completely unrelated note, have you ever considered wearing a skirt? And if so, how short?”

“You need a lobotomy,” Till tells him honestly.

“I’d let you poke my brain with a sharp tool as much as you want,” Ivan says without missing a beat.

Till stares at his phone for several seconds. He can’t take this anymore. “I’m hanging up now. And blocking your number.”

“Till –”

Till doesn’t hear the rest. Stupid fucking Ivan. He’s probably going to use this against Till somehow, most likely when he least expects it. Forty years from now, they’ll be old and wrinkly and still somehow close, and Ivan will bring up Till’s cross-dressing hentai fetish in front of Ivan’s trophy wife and their, like, fifteen void-eyed children.

Then, Till will be the one that gets arrested for corrupting the youth, because Ivan is some mafioso with the police in his pocket in this scenario.

Ivan pulls up a few minutes later in his too-nice-for-a-seventeen-year-old-car. Till silently opens the door and settles inside, not even fighting the seatbelt rule. He clicks it in place, then resolutely stares forward, arms crossed over his chest. His face still feels warm, fucking great.

Ivan opens his mouth.

Till quickly interrupts him. “Not a word. I’m fucking serious, Ivan. I’ll jump into oncoming traffic. Don’t test me.”

“My lips are sealed,” Ivan says, checking the rearview mirror before he pulls back onto the road.

The first thing Till does when they get home is throw open the passenger door and bolt upstairs to his room. Ivan is stuck parking his car in the garage, so he can’t follow Till inside and corner him.

With the air of ripping off a bandaid, Till opens his bedroom door and steps inside. His laundry hamper is conspicuously empty. Till enters all five stages of grief at once, which is a little impressive, because he usually gets stuck at ‘anger’ most of the time.

“Fuck,” he mutters, pulling at his hair. “Fuck, fuck, fuck.”

There’s no time to curse himself after his initial outburst. He has to apologize to his poor mom. He has to. She had to gingerly pick up his stiff boxers, put them in the hamper, and then wash and dry them knowing what he’d done. She probably doesn’t even care that much. Till tends to be dramatic. He can admit that.

Io is in the kitchen cooking dinner when Till approaches, hanging his head like a repentant dog. “Mom.”

Io turns around and beams. “Till! I thought I heard you come in. By the way, what did you do to your brother? He looked –”

“Forget about Ivan,” Till says, unable to take it anymore. “You did the laundry today, didn’t you?”

Io blinks at him. “Laundry? No, I don’t think so.”

Till goes numb all over. “What.”

Io offers him one of her warm, motherly smiles. “If your laundry is missing, then Ivan probably washed it. I asked him to help around the house today. You don’t mind, do you?”

Ivan.

Ivan saw his. His stiff boxers. The embarrassing ones with a pink heart over the ass.

Till falls to his knees. His world is crumbling. This is genuinely the end of the line for him. On a list of things that signify the end times, Ivan doing Till’s laundry and coming across his jizz-stained underwear is probably at the very top. Red alert. This is not a drill. This is so fucked up.

“Till?” Io frowns, her face wrinkling with concern. “Are you alright?”

As ever with Till, the despair and humiliation don’t last long before they morph into anger. Till finds his feet and takes a deep breath, rallying his strength. He doesn’t win fights with Ivan anymore, but his fist needs to make contact with Ivan’s stupid face. This is his fault. Never mind the fact that he was just being helpful. He’s such a freak, and this can’t be a coincidence.

“I need to talk to Ivan,” Till says.

He turns sharply on his heel, walks upstairs, and finds Ivan in his bedroom. The door is open, because Ivan is not a cagey youth who hides away. Somehow, it makes Till angrier. Ivan’s room is so neat, tidy, and sparsely decorated. He doesn’t hang posters up like Till, nor does he leave dirty laundry on the floor.

“Till,” Ivan says, looking up from his laptop. He’s sitting at his desk, clearly feigning innocence. “What brings you to my room today? Willingly, at that.”

“Cut the bullshit,” Till snarls, vibrating with poorly-concealed restraint. “I know you saw it.”

Ivan has the audacity to look confused. “Saw what? You didn’t post anything on instagram last I checked, but I’m sure your sixty followers would appreciate –”

Till walks forward and grabs Ivan by the collar of his stupid shirt, jerking him close until their faces are only a few inches away. “The boxers. Don’t act innocent! How many pictures did you take, and who did you send them to?”

Ivan’s snaggletooth protrudes over his bottom lip around a giddy smile. The sick bastard loves when Till gets violently angry. “I’m hurt that you’d think I’d blackmail you like that.”

“You’re so fucking full of shit,” Till hisses, shaking him for good measure. He hopes Ivan’s brain rattles in his skull, crippling him for life. “You saw them.”

“I did.” Ivan’s eyes are bright, almost manic. “They were such a mess. You were backed up, weren’t you? You should let loose more often. As your older brother, I can recommend a few tissue brands, but you really shouldn’t make a habit of cleaning up your ejaculate with your underwear.”

Till releases him with a disgusted grunt. Ivan falls back into his chair, and Till pinches the bridge of his nose while he wrestles with his temper. Io would be so disappointed if they had a real fight again – they haven’t beaten each other bloody in almost two years. It’d make her so sad, especially since Till always gets his ass kicked.

“How much do you want?” Till asks eventually.

Ivan tilts his head. “For the tissues? For you, the first box is free.”

“Ivan,” Till says. Deep breaths. He can be civil. It doesn’t help that Ivan’s room *smells* like him, the crisp scent of clean soap and something distinctly Ivan. “Enough. I’m being serious. How much? Two hundred, three hundred?”

“I think you’re vastly overestimating the cost of a tissue box, Till.”

“Stop! You know what I’m talking about! The – The fucking pictures you took –”

“Why would I take pictures of your underwear,” Ivan asks, worded more like a statement. He looks genuinely puzzled.

Till pauses. Bites his lip, teeth digging into the plush pink flesh. Distracted as he is, he doesn't see Ivan's loser eyes staring at his mouth. "You didn't… You really aren't planning on anything?"

"How would that even work, Till?" Ivan asks, raising his eyebrows. "I send a picture of your dirty underwear to my group chat to humiliate you?"

"S-Something like that," Till replies, still gnawing on his bottom lip. Mizi is in that group chat. All of the popular kids are.

"And provided that I don't get called gay, which is very unlikely, I enjoy the sick satisfaction of bullying my younger brother in a weird and perverse way for absolutely no personal gain?" Ivan continues slowly, like he really is just trying to get his facts straight. "Is that right?"

"When you say it like that…" Till mumbles, blushing so hard he can feel the tips of his ears burning. Ivan is weird, but in retrospect, he's not *that* much of a freak. Hopefully. It's always hopefully with him, because Ivan's mind works in mysterious and diseased ways.

Ivan has already turned back to his laptop. Some sort of AP literature assignment, Till thinks. "So, you're aware how ridiculous you sound right now. I'm glad we had this conversation."

"You're up to something," Till accuses.

"Yes. It's called homework." Ivan is typing something up, entirely focused on his screen. "You should try it sometime."

"I don't need homework. I'm going to be a famous guitarist. I'll start my own band and have millions of raving fans, and you'll be stuck with a nine to five."

"You're so cute," Ivan says abruptly. He's resting his chin in his palm, elbow placed on the desk, while he looks up at Till and smiles his snaggletooth smile. It's a good thing he never aims this smile at anyone else – except for Io – because a girl would probably faint if she saw Ivan like this.

"F-Fuck you," Till replies instinctively. He realizes he doesn't have to be in here, so he hurries to leave. "I'm leaving," he says, just to make it clear.

Ivan is back to typing. "See you at dinner, Till. I'll help you fold your laundry later."

Ivan doesn't bring it up again. Till is suspicious, but he also wants to put this whole thing behind him, so he lets it slide. For now.

Currently, it's Friday night. Till is freezing his ass off in the stands with Io. She always forces him to come to Ivan's games – this one is so important to him, Till, it's the playoffs, he'll play so much better with you there – and now Till's stuck here, blocked in by the screaming crowd.

Io offered to buy him nachos, but concession stand food is fucking disgusting, so Till would rather starve. He's bundled up in a scarf and hat, but he still can't feel his fingers or toes. He doesn't know how the football team walks around in only their uniforms. Fucking freaks.

It's a close game. Io gets up at halftime to use the restroom and buy them both a hot chocolate, leaving Till to weather the marching band's performance alone. He's one of the only people left in the bleachers, probably doing a great impression of a lonely, cold penguin stranded on its own.

He scans the sidelines. Ivan is also one of the few remaining players on the field, the rest having entered the locker room to get warmed up. The coach won't be happy to have his halftime pep talk without the star quarterback present, but that's Ivan's problem, not Till's.

Somehow, Ivan must feel Till's gaze, because he sharply looks up. His helmet is off, and his black, inky hair is sticking to his forehead with sweat. A girl on the field playing her clarinet looks like she's seconds away from passing out at the sight.

"Ugh," Till says, with feeling.

Ivan lingers by the fence separating the track from the field, and Till realizes that Ivan is waiting for him to approach. Ivan's so pathetic. Like a sad, kicked puppy waiting at the door for his owner. Such a loser. He should be rallying with his team. And here he is, waiting just in case Till will feel sorry enough to talk to him.

Till's feet move on their own, he swears. He gets up and walks down the bleachers to see what Ivan wants, but he doesn't make it more than a few steps before a cheerleader approaches Ivan, beaming.

A stab of annoyance *very* briefly crosses Ivan's features, but it's gone in a flash. No one would have noticed except Till. He's got that slimy smile, that thick coating of princely polish. It works like a charm every time.

Till figures he may as well keep walking. Once he's in earshot, he hears the cheerleader saying over the marching band, "We're having a party at my place tonight after the game. Lots of alcohol. My parents won't be home all weekend."

Till frowns. Ivan never goes out on Friday nights. Those are game nights with Io. They play video games and watch movies together. If Till is feeling especially generous, he'll allow a game or two of Monopoly. Possibly scrabble, but Ivan always wins, so it's never much fun.

Ivan tucks his helmet under his arm, holding it against his side. "I don't drink."

"Oh." The cheerleader looks briefly crushed. "But you can still come, can't you? No one will pressure you. Oh! And there's going to be weed and ecstasy too –"

"He doesn't want to go," Till interrupts, leaning against the fence like a proper delinquent. "You should take a hint."

The cheerleader's eyebrows raise, and she slowly turns to Till. "Oh, you. The guy Mizi rejected."

Till snorts. "Yeah. I'm eyeliner guy, emo guy, the guy Mizi rejected. Take your pick." He doesn't want to see what kind of expression Ivan is making, but it won't be the first time Till's foul temper has landed Ivan into trouble, and it won't be the last. "Doesn't change the fact that Ivan's not going to your stupid basement party."

The cheerleader laughs incredulously. "You're such a loser. Do you know that?"

"Better than spreading my legs for half the football team just so people'll like me," Till counters.

Ivan is suspiciously quiet, which is weird. Usually, he smooths things over whenever their worlds clash. Till can feel Ivan's gaze boring into the side of his head, but he doesn't pay him much mind.

The cheerleader's smile turns mean. "Aw, you'd probably like that, wouldn't you?"

"Does it itch?" Till asks suddenly, picking at his chipped nail polish. "All the STDs, I mean. Are you going for the full collection?"

The cheerleader looks like she's fighting back tears, clearing her throat several times before she speaks. It still cracks. "I'm going to have my boyfriend beat you up so bad, your mom won't even recognize you."

Till laughs. It's hilarious that she thought she could be meaner than him – Till is a fucking terror, and she clearly missed the memo. "Cool. I'm free after school on Monday. Send two guys if you want it to be a fair fight."

She turns and leaves, sobbing as she goes. People are staring at Till like *he's* the asshole, but he's used to it. Ivan, on the other hand, is still looking at him funny.

"What?" Till asks peevishly. "Don't tell me you actually wanted to go to that party."

"No," Ivan says, blinking several times like he's coming out of a daze. "I still have to beat you at Mario Kart. You won last week."

Till grins. No matter how popular Ivan is, he'll still choose Till and Io above anyone else. Shitty game nights are their thing. "Sure you don't want to try MDMA?"

"What's this about drugs?" Io asks, holding two steaming cups of hot chocolate in her hands.

Till's heart freezes to ice. The world grinds to a stop. It's the second time this week that the ground has crumbled beneath him – first when Ivan found his suspiciously stiff boxers, and now with his mom overhearing him talk about taking drugs. It was a joke, he wants to say. He wonders if she'll believe him.

"I don't mind you two experimenting," Io continues when she sees both of their ashen faces. "But you probably shouldn't take MDMA together. It has some… side effects that aren't

appropriate for two brothers in a room alone together. Don't ask me how I know this."

"What," Till manages. His mouth's as dry as the desert. "It's not like that."

Io is frowning at the loudly crying girl a few yards away. "Till, I hope that wasn't you."

"Of course not," Till says, at the same time Ivan opens his mouth.

"It was him," Ivan says like the rat he is. Then, less like a rat, he continues, "He heroically saved me from turning down a basement party with drugs. By the way, I appreciate the gesture, Till, but I'm used to it. I would also appreciate it if you didn't make people cry in my presence, but I know that you can't help it when you're upset."

"Who said I was upset," Till mutters angrily. He shouldn't have done shit for Ivan.

Io's face lights up. "Till, baby, were you protecting your older brother?"

"We're not brothers!" Till hisses, looking around. People are *staring.* He pulls his beanie down to try and hide his eyes. "I'm not related to this freak!"

Io passes a cup of hot chocolate into Till's hand, then pinches his cheek. "It's okay to care. I know there's a sensitive, loving boy underneath all of that eyeliner. I raised him."

Ivan, in true Ivan fashion, also pinches Till's cheek, tugging even harder than Io. Caught between them, Till's face flushes a deep, rosy red until he can't take it anymore.

Till slaps Ivan's hand away. Then, he gently fights Io's grip until he's free at last. He points a finger at Ivan, still red with embarrassment, and declares before retreating to the stands, "I hope you get a fucking concussion, shithead!"

Everyone gasps. Except for Ivan, who smiles at Till with his stupid snaggletooth on full display, like Till's words are more encouraging than whatever the cheer squad has been doing for the past hour and a half.

Unfortunately, Ivan does not get a concussion. He plays the best game of his life after the halftime period is over, leading the team to victory. They're securely in the semi-finals for their division, and Io is ecstatic. That's her boy, she says with teary eyes. The coach is chatting her up, and Ivan and Till both glare daggers at the man until he retreats.

Till refuses to let Ivan have everything, though. He kicks Ivan's ass at Mario Kart for the second week in a row, which he is totally normal about. He doesn't rub it in Ivan's face. Except that he does. Gloriously. They eat pizza and celebrate until Io falls asleep on the couch, and then Ivan carries her to bed like a charming prince.

By the way, Till does not hang out with Ivan. Ivan just so happens to pester him late into the night while Till is strumming his guitar, and he tolerates Ivan's presence. Currently, Ivan's coloring one of Till's drawings with a very serious expression on his face, completely focused on his task.

When Ivan holds up the paper, Till almost falls over laughing. “Oh my god, you can’t even – even color inside the lines, Ivan, holy shit.”

Ivan frowns at the picture. Till drew him an astronaut cat, as per Ivan’s request, and it’s totally ruined now. “I thought my use of crayon was very artistic.”

“Yeah, for a toddler.” Till reaches over to pluck the paper from Ivan’s fingers, gleefully taking it all in. “I think this is the worst coloring job I’ve ever seen. Why is the cat blue?”

Ivan blinks. “They say blue is the saddest color.”

Till also blinks at him. “Is the cat, like, depressed?”

“It could be,” Ivan replies easily, examining the picture over Till’s shoulder like an art snob. “Space is a big, lonely place for a cat. Maybe it left Earth because of unrequited love, and now it's looking to the stars for answers.”

Till can’t believe some of the shit that comes out of Ivan’s mouth. School heart throb, star quarterback, making a sad backstory for an astronaut cat doodle in Till’s messy room on a Friday night.

“Yeah, well, maybe it left Earth because someone was obnoxiously in love with it, and it had to leave for its own safety.”

“You think the blue cat is being stalked?” Ivan asks, stroking his chin like a true appreciator of the arts. “And its solution is launching itself into outer space?”

“Are you high,” Till has to ask.

“'I think the air from your room is affecting me,” Ivan replies. “There might be a gas leak.”

“I wish your freak behavior was because of a gas leak,” Till states, because wouldn’t that be a dream? “Then you could be *fixed.*”

Ivan is still looking at the stupid drawing, his expression unreadable. “Please don’t launch yourself into outer space, Till.”

“Dude, forget about the stupid cat,” Till says, crumbling the paper into a ball so Ivan can stop being such a freak about it. Once he’s finished, he hands it to Ivan. “Here.”

Ivan begins the painstaking task of unfolding it without tearing the paper, until Till sighs and rips it from his hands again. Ivan looks way too sad about his blue astronaut cat, and Till can’t take it anymore.

“No, I meant, like –” Till refolds the paper into a ball, then passes it into Ivan’s hand. “Use your freakish sport talent to throw it into the trash can from here.”

“Not that I don’t appreciate you recognizing my talents,” Ivan says, gazing at the ball of paper in his hand, “But I’d really rather keep this. It’s my first collaboration.”

“Ivan, I doodled that in a minute.”

“It took me twenty minutes to color,” Ivan replies. “It has value, Till.”

“If you can make the shot into the trash can from my bed,” Till begins, “I’ll let you sleep here tonight.”

Ivan instantly launches the ball of paper across the room. It lands perfectly inside the trash can, not even bouncing on the rim. It’s one of those things people do that is instantly impressive to everybody, including Till. He can’t help but let out a startled laugh and clap Ivan over the shoulder.

“Ivan, what the fuck. That was crazy,” Till is saying, reaching for his sketchbook to doodle something else. Enrichment, or Ivan will sit here moping about his cat forever. “What do you want this time?”

Ivan considers it for a long moment. “A second astronaut cat, to rescue the other –”

Till hits him with the sketchbook.

After that, they polish off the rest of the pizza and watch a shitty movie on Till’s laptop. By the time it’s over, Till can barely keep his eyes open. Ivan is currently standing beside Till’s bed, and Till – half-asleep – mumbles something about pineapples, patting the empty spot next to him. He isn’t making a whole lot of sense right now, but Ivan must understand.

Slowly, like he’s waiting to be rebutted, Ivan stiffly settles beside Till. He’s acting so cautious, like he’s crawling into bed with a live grenade rather than his fucking stepbrother.

Till is too exhausted to put up with Ivan’s weirdness right now, so he grabs Ivan by his arm and forcefully tugs him close, at least enough that he won’t fall off the bed. Ivan falls against Till, making a soft, wounded noise.

Within seconds, Till’s out like a light, but he thinks Ivan is stroking his hair. It feels nice, so he lets it soothe him into an even deeper sleep.

Saturday mornings are pretty boring, if Till is being honest.

He wakes up with a yawn, relieved to find that Ivan is gone. Maybe Till’s bed was uncomfortable, who knows. The drawing of the astronaut cat is conspicuously missing from the trash can, but Till sort of expected that, so whatever. Ivan’s weird about a lot of things. It isn’t strange for him to get sentimental over a doodle.

“Good morning,” Io greets when Till finally wanders downstairs. “Hungry?”

Till breathes out a sigh. “Mom, I don’t deserve you.”

“Aren’t you a charmer this morning?” Io hums, leading him to the kitchen. “But cooking is a team effort in this house, so get to work, mister.”

Till helps her make breakfast, dutifully mixing the pancake batter. He instinctively reaches for a bag of chocolate chips to mix in for Ivan until Io interrupts him.

“Oh, don’t worry about Ivan, sweetie. He left early to grab a bite to eat with the team’s seniors – Coach Carter’s treat.”

“Oh, thank fuck,” Till breathes. He hates ruining half the batch with chocolate chips.

“Language,” Io chides, but it’s half hearted. She’s never tried to suppress his… character, unpleasant as it is sometimes.

Breakfast is as delicious as always. It’s lucky that Till walked down here and found Io alone, because the food would be fucking inedible if Ivan helped her make it. He’s a menace in the kitchen.

Last week, he tried to make a frozen pizza for Till and forgot to take the plastic off. There have also been multiple instances of metal in the microwave, and don’t even get Till started on that time Ivan burned *water* .

After he’s done eating, Till considers what he’s going to do with his Saturday. He could try working on that new song, or maybe he’ll pull out the easel and paint something. Or, if he’s feeling lazy, he could play Minecraft with his online friends until dinner, but he did that last week.

Ivan’s room happens to be the first on the second floor, so there’s no helping looking inside when you climb the stairs. Ivan also leaves his door open, because he’s Ivan and he has nothing to hide. No dirty laundry, no messes that he hasn’t gotten around to cleaning up yet.

And that’s when Till sees it.

Ivan’s laptop is open on his desk, unlocked. Currently in the browser with the school’s home page pulled up.

Till’s mouth falls open. This is literally the opportunity of the century. He looks around, peers downstairs, but Io is busy doing her morning yoga. Ivan is nowhere to be seen, stuck at a stupid breakfast with his meathead teammates.

He still doesn’t believe Ivan is going to let the suspiciously stiff boxers go. It’s just not in Ivan’s freak nature. And here Till is, suddenly and benevolently presented with the perfect chance to blackmail him back if Ivan does decide to humiliate him.

There has to be some dirt on Ivan’s laptop. He’s a seventeen year old in his final year of high school. There has to be something incriminating on there, something embarrassing. Celebrity foot porn, maybe.

And, if Till is being completely honest with himself, a part of him is genuinely curious about what he might find on Ivan’s laptop. Ivan is a model student, a perfect athlete, but he has to have some skeletons in his closet.

Right?

“Just a peek,” Till mutters to himself. On some level, he knows what he’s doing is wrong. Ivan would probably be genuinely upset with him if he knew. But that’s the thing.

Ivan won’t know. And he was such an asshole about the Mizi thing, so Till isn’t exactly feeling charitable toward him right now.

Resolved, Till steps inside Ivan’s room. Miraculously, there aren’t any red alerts and tripwires in the doorway. It’s just a normal room, albeit sterile. The laptop beckons him, a literal treasure trove of secrets waiting to be discovered.

Till doesn’t sit down. Ivan has a freak memory, and he’d probably notice if his chair was positioned differently than how he’d left it. Instead, Till stands at the desk, biting his lip, before he finally leans down to peer at the screen.

“This is so fucked up,” Till tells himself, using the touchpad to pull up Ivan’s search history.

Of course, that doesn’t tell him shit. Ivan’s the sort of guy who probably jerks off in incognito mode, so it’s all normal stuff. Researching schools. Sports team statistics. A youtube compilation of silly grey cats.

There has to be something. *Something.* Ivan can’t be perfect. He just can’t, not when Till knows what a freak he secretly is. He probably has pictures of women’s dirty socks hidden on here, or –

That’s when Till notices that there are two chrome profiles on Ivan’s computer. The first is linked to his school email, but the second account is a bunch of random letters and numbers. The profile picture is black.

This is Till’s lucky break. He found Ivan’s burner account.

Till looks around one last time to make sure the coast is clear, and then he clicks into the second Chrome profile. At first, nothing is amiss. No bookmarks, no strange websites pulled up, but Till sifts through the menu to find Ivan’s browser history, and –

The gleeful smile slips straight from Till’s face. His mouth is suddenly dry as dust. A list of porn sites pop up, all with similar titles.

Horny twink stepbrother gets pounded by older brother

Stepbrothers fucking under blanket

Spin the bottle lands on innocent stepbrother

Virgin twink stepbrother rides huge cock raw

Cute little stepbrother gets dominated by older

Stepbrother seduction attempt

And, most recently:

Stepbrother cums inside while younger sleeps

Till… made a fucking mistake. It genuinely feels like his world is crumbling down around him this time.

He clicks on a link at random. *Emo twink stepbrother rides jock,* and it takes him to some exclusive porn site Till hasn't even fucking heard of. Does Ivan… pay a subscription for this shit? Till feels dizzy.

The video plays, thankfully with no sound. The younger twink brother is wearing a bunch of tacky clothes straight from Hot Topic. Black and white striped arm warmers, obscenely short shorts with black thigh highs, and a ratty t-shirt with the fabric spilling over one bony shoulder. He's wearing a choker exactly like the one Till is wearing. Lots of eyeliner.

The older jock brother wrestles with the younger brother until the guy lustfully gives in and sucks his dick. They're in a locker room. Then, he rides the guy's huge cock like a pro. Till can't even imagine taking something like that up his ass.

There's a tension in Till's head. It hurts, pounding in time with his heartbeat. His throat feels dry and tight. Once the video finally finishes, he clicks on another at random. A different title with a different scenario, but the content is the exact same.

Older stepbrother pounding into the younger. Till clicks another. The same thing. Over and over.

Any thoughts of looking for dirt on Ivan are now long gone. A rollercoaster of emotions surges through Till at a frankly terrifying speed, and he tries to reason with himself.

It's fucking Ivan. He can't be gay. He can't be… It's just a coincidence. Till is coincidentally his stepbrother, and Ivan is coincidentally into gay stepbrother porn. Just because Ivan likes this messed up shit doesn't mean he feels that way toward Till.

But most of the videos lean toward emo twinks. Ones who wear too much eyeliner, none of them rocking it nearly as good as Till.

It's a small victory, to be better looking than these gay twink pornstars. Till wishes he had the energy to appreciate it more. He wonders if it ever bothers Ivan, if Ivan has been searching through all this nasty porn looking for someone like Till, someone to scratch his disgusting, repulsive itch –

Does… Ivan want to do this to Till? Pound his younger stepbrother's guts into mush, just like in this porno?

Till closes out of the Chrome profile and gets the hell out of there before he throws Ivan's laptop at a wall. He leaves everything exactly as it had been before he'd entered, numbly walking to his own room to curl up in bed.

He's overreacting. Ivan isn't. He doesn't. He just *can't,* okay? He's Till's older brother. That's all he is. He's not into Till. They've known each other for so long. They're practically related,

raised by the same woman.

It's a fluke. A coincidence. Ivan isn't a pervert. He's – Till imagined the whole thing. Ivan is actually into something super tame, like Taylor Swift's feet, and.

And.

Fuck.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

I'm gay, Till thinks hysterically. I'm gay for Ivan.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In retrospect, it honestly explains so much.

Till spends the rest of Saturday afternoon moping in bed. It's not exactly out of character for him, so no one comes in to see if he's alive. If anyone asks, he'll just blame it on a headache.

It isn't far from the truth. Till's had a whole lot of Ivan-induced headaches in his life, but this one might be the worst.

It's just – Ivan is gay. Ivan is fucking *gay.* Like, subscription-to-gay-porn-sites-gay. He pays a fee to watch emo twinks get their guts rearranged by nine inch cocks. There's a lot of dick sucking happening, too. A metric fuckton of choking and makeup-stained tears.

As always, Till's imagination is running wild. Usually that's a good thing, because it sparks ideas for new songs and paintings. But now he'd give anything to bleach his brain and scrub this whole fucking morning from his mind.

Till's wild imagination conjures up a vivid scene of Ivan sitting at his desk late at night, sweatpants pulled down just enough to free his hard, throbbing cock. Looking around, making sure the coast is clear, before he pulls up his favorite gay porn site. Snaggletooth digging into his bottom lip as he pumps his cock, watching with rapt attention as the Till lookalike on screen licks some jock's sweaty balls.

Does Ivan imagine it's Till sucking him off? It would be such a disaster. Till's always had a strong gag reflex. Ivan knows this.

It'd be so unsexy, Till choking and slobbering all over Ivan's cock, snot and tears dripping down his face. But maybe Ivan's into that. Till will never make the mistake of assuming anything about Ivan ever again, because holy shit.

Till stares at the ceiling in his room. Fuck. No wonder Ivan has never brought a girl home. He's gay, first off. Secondly, he (probably) fantasizes about pounding his younger stepbrother into his bed every night, leaving him a gaping, cum-drenched mess. The cheer squad would be so disappointed.

And the icing on the fucking cake is the fact that Till *still* doesn't have any blackmail material on Ivan. Till recognizes that outing Ivan would be an objectively awful thing to do, so now he's just stewing and empty-handed.

Ivan won without even trying, fucking great.

How is Till supposed to live with Ivan now? The full force of Ivan's freak behavior is exclusively directed toward Till, and now he knows why. How's he supposed to laugh Ivan off knowing what he does? Jesus. The phlegm. The weird interest in Till's favorite hentai genre.

Holy shit. *The thigh thing.* That night they were sitting on the couch, and Till had groped Ivan's leg. His reaction was so fucking weird, because he isn't ticklish. Looking back, Till realizes that he's been a fucking moron. People don't whimper when they get tickled, and they don't hide their lap under a blanket afterward.

Ivan was hard. Hard, just because Till had squeezed his quad muscle.

In any other situation, Till would find that hilarious. Serves Ivan right for being such a pathetic loser. The most popular and accomplished person in their entire school, and he'd probably come in his pants if Till had sat on his lap that night.

Till flips over onto his stomach, peering at his phone screen for answers. Big fucking surprise: the internet isn't helpful. He bites his lip and googles 'my brother is gay.' Reddit tells him to accept Ivan for who he is and offer him love and support. It takes everything Till has not to throw his phone at the wall, because yeah right.

Not only is Ivan a freak, but he's also a gay pervert.

Till is very clearly the victim here. Nevermind the fact that he was the one to search Ivan's laptop without his consent. At least Ivan is only interested in Till sexually. Silver fucking lining.

Ivan must be home from that stupid breakfast with his team, and Till can't deal with him right now. He'll probably end up saying something genuinely hurtful, and Ivan's eyes will go wide for a brief second until he smooths his expression, tacking on a slimy smile and assuring Io that no, my feelings aren't hurt, Till's just having a bad day, I don't mind.

Till hates that. Ivan is allowed to aim that slimy smile at literally anyone else, but never at Till.

Thus begins operation Avoid Ivan at All Costs.

Monday rolls around, and Till can't stop thinking about his stepbrother's dick.

Coincidentally, there's a torrential downpour happening outside, thwarting Till's plan to walk to school and avoid Ivan, because Till's life is a fucking joke, and he's the ground beneath the comedian's feet.

Till is standing on the front porch, watching the rain patter against the wet, soggy earth. He doesn't know who he pissed off in his past life to earn him this kind of karma, but it probably wasn't his fault. At least, that's what he's telling himself.

"The offer for a ride still stands," Ivan says.

Turns out, it's hard to avoid someone when you *live* with them. Till's face is warm, because Ivan's presence is an unwelcome reminder of the dick between his legs. The dick that gets hard when Till touches him in vaguely inappropriate ways. Which was an accident, by the way.

Till is a pervert now, and it's all Ivan's fault. He should not be held responsible for imagining the exact length and thickness of his stepbrother's cock. Ivan is the freak, not Till, and he isn't weird for pondering the consistency of Ivan's cum on a Monday morning at 7am.

Till bravely pulls up his hood. "It's just a little rain. It'll… It'll stop any second."

"I don't think that's true," Ivan replies, pocketing his school lanyard and keys. His car is idling in the driveway – started remotely – and the bright headlights cut through the gloom of the rain.

Suddenly, as if to spite Till, the weather intensifies. The roar of water crashing against the roof of the porch is almost deafening, but Till's internal screaming is louder.

"Hm," Ivan says, not sounding the least bit surprised. "Looks like it's coming down harder."

"I mean, fucking obviously," Till huffs, crossing his arms against the chill in the air. He refuses to look at Ivan. If he does, he'll have perverted thoughts about Ivan's varsity jacket, so it's really for the best. "I'm not getting in your stupid car."

Till cannot look at Ivan's hands on the steering wheel right now. He'll have, like, a full body reaction, and Ivan will drive him to the hospital, and the doctors will tell Ivan that Till's a freak that gets a half-chub when he sees his stepbrother's long fingers curled around the steering wheel, and then –

"Is it the air freshener?" Ivan asks after a long, contemplative silence.

"What?" Till didn't even notice Ivan had one in his car. "I don't give a shit about what your car smells like."

"Extremely untrue fact," Ivan informs him, tone clinical. "I've tested several scents now, and you've had a slightly positive reaction to Moonlight Breeze. My initial theory regarding your delicate olfactory sense suggested that you would enjoy something mild, but we can try Apple Mango Sunshine again if you'd like. Vanilla bean is also an option, but recent tests have proved you don't enjoy gourmand fragrances."

Sometimes, it feels like Ivan isn't even speaking the same language as Till. "You're such a fucking freak," Till manages to wheeze. "Why are you keeping track? How long have you been doing this?"

“Don’t ask questions you don’t want to know the answers to, Till.”

Honestly, he’s right. There’s no hope trying to understand Ivan – Till would have an easier time solving the fucking meaning of life. Even the most celebrated and accomplished psychologist in the world would spend an hour with Ivan and end up jumping out a window by the end of it.

“Have you been analyzing my facial expressions every time I get in your car?” Till has to ask.

“Of course not. That would be ridiculous.”

Till breathes out a sigh of relief. “Good.”

“I have a spreadsheet for that.”

Till chokes on his own spit. “You *what?* ”

Ivan shrugs, completely nonchalant, like he’s not the craziest fucking person Till knows. “It’s color-coded and everything. I can show you if you want. You might learn something about yourself.”

It’s too early for this. Till pinches the bridge of his nose to fend off another Ivan-induced headache. “In what world would I want to see your weird stalker spreadsheet about me?”

Ivan reaches into his pocket to grab his phone. “Don’t insult the data. It’s important to me, and I worked very hard to collect it.”

“I’m walking,” Till declares before Ivan can pull up Excel. There’s only so much ivanism Till can take at seven in the morning. He tucks his hands into his pockets, hunkers down, and continues before stepping off the porch, “I hope you crash and fucking die.”

Till makes it approximately three steps before Ivan throws an arm around his shoulders and directs him toward the car. His body heat seeps through their combined layers of clothing, and a nonsensical part of Till wants to glue himself to Ivan’s chest and zip up the varsity jacket with Till inside.

(Like a burrito. A big, warm burrito. No one would ever find him. He could melt himself into Ivan’s clothes for the day. Like, “ *What’s that sticking to your shirt, Ivan?” “Oh, that’s just my emo stepbrother, whom I also fantasize about seeing naked.” “Awesome, dude. Thanks for sharing.”)*

Also, he can smell Ivan’s aftershave. Something soothing and masculine, like amber or sandalwood. Maybe Till should take a look at that spreadsheet after all, just to see if Ivan’s data on him notes a preference toward warm, earthy fragrances.

“You’ll have plenty of time to sulk and pretend I don’t exist during the ride to school,” Ivan is saying as he opens the car door for Till, shielding him from the rain with his jacket, “But please don’t walk in this weather and get sick, Till.”

Till isn't putting up much of a fight, on account of his brain turning to mush via the hardcore stepbrother porn polluting his mind. He's actually salivating, because Ivan's arm is over his shoulder. Like he's – he's Ivan's *girlfriend* or something.

It's embarrassing, but it has a nice ring to it. Being Ivan's girl, even if Till's a dude. And now he's imagining Ivan's big hand tangled in his hair, holding Till steady while he feeds the tip of his cock into his mouth.

And it's sort of insane, but Till could like… ask for that. There's a ninety percent chance Ivan would say yes, because he's the freak who fantasizes about blowing his younger step-brother's back out. It's one of those horrible thoughts you hate yourself for having, but here they are.

Till is very much thinking about pawing at Ivan's dick while he drives. He sneaks a glance at Ivan's crotch. Gray sweatpants. Till's mouth is, like, full of drool right now. It's disgusting. Till makes a feeble attempt to focus on the crisp, refreshing scent of Moonlight Breeze, but Ivan.

Gray sweatpants. It's obscene.

Maybe it's Till's imagination, but he *swears* he can see the imprint of Ivan's dick through the fabric. But there's no fucking way Ivan is packing that much heat, especially while soft, so it has to be something else. A water bottle, maybe.

Till stares at the side profile of Ivan's face. He's stupidly handsome, and a bead of sweat drips down Till's temple.

No one's ever… liked Till before. Not romantically, and definitely not sexually. It's a weird feeling to know he's sitting next to someone who would gladly take his V card. Made weirder by the fact that it's *Ivan,* the guy Till grew up with for the last seven years.

Hormones. It's just… teenage hormones. Till isn't into Ivan. Ivan is just… available. He has an interest in emo twinks, and Till fits the bill. That's all it is. It also just so happens that they're stepbrothers, and Ivan is apparently into that.

Till is decidedly *not* into that shit. He's normal.

Till is not normal. He realizes this somewhere between third and fourth period when he imagines swirling his tongue around Ivan's cockhead, and it's all but confirmed by eighth when he has ceramics with Ivan.

"Why are your eyelashes so fucking long?" Till blurts, then goes bright red and ducks his head before Ivan can see. "Don't answer that. I don't care."

Ivan is currently attempting to make a cup with the clay Till wedged earlier. It looks more like a bowl, but the art teacher praises him nonetheless. Pretty privilege, Till thinks.

“Genetics, I suppose,” Ivan replies. His stupid tongue is sticking out while he focuses on creating a handle, and the soft pink flesh is warped underneath his snaggletooth. He looks like a dog. It’s fucking disgusting. Till wants to taste him. “What do you think of it so far, Till?”

Till stares at the bowl-cup. Ivan looks so earnest, and the petty, mean response Till was cooking up dies on his tongue. “I think you might pass.” The clay handle is wilting downward. “Maybe.”

Ivan frowns. “I imagined getting my first D in college. Do you think I should try and make something more abstract? It might be harder to critique.”

Pfft. Ivan’s 4.5 gpa, ruined because he’s so shit at art. The thought almost cheers Till up. “It’s not a fucking painting, Ivan. You can’t make it expressionistic.”

“Three more, Till,” drones the art teacher from her desk. Till can’t even be bothered with her right now. He’s already down to three swears, and they still have thirty minutes left. This isn’t looking good for him.

“Using cubism on a physical medium sounds plausible to me,” Ivan says. “Couldn’t I just make a square cup?”

“You’re so fucking stupid,” Till tells him honestly. “That’s not what cubism means.”

Ivan is already shaping his clay to have four sides. “I was under the assumption that abstract art is up to interpretation.”

“Oh yeah?” Till is supposed to be working on his project too, but he’s never had a problem getting an A in any art class, so he’s not worried. “And what is a square cup supposed to represent? Other than being a fucking nightmare every time someone tries to drink out of it.”

Till can see it now – Ivan will give the cup to Io like a proud kid asking for his crayon drawing to be hung up on the fridge. Io will do a valiant attempt to hide the raising of her eyebrows before she says something like, *oh, Ivan, you shouldn’t have. That’s so sweet, I love it.* And then she’ll try using it and make a mess, and Till will laugh his ass off at them both.

“You’re overthinking it, Till.” Ivan’s deft hands shape the clay into something that resembles a lopsided prism. “Sometimes art exists simply to make people feel something. In your case, the absurdity of my square cup evokes anger and envy.”

“You’re so full of shit,” Till mutters, rolling his eyes. Just his luck to be stuck in an art class with Ivan.

His own clay is sitting untouched in front of him, but he doesn’t need to rush. He could make something in ten minutes and still ace this stupid assignment. Watching Ivan struggle is way more entertaining. It’s such a rarity. Usually, it’s the other way around, so sue Till for wanting to imprint this into his memory.

Ivan finally spares him a glance. “You’re awfully critical for someone who hasn’t started his project yet.”

Till huffs and leans back in his chair. He wore arm warmers today – classy, simple black, unlike that poser emo twink from the porno – and he’d really rather not get clay on them. “Unlike you, I don’t need to brute force my way into mediocrity.”

Ivan laughs. “Your algebra grade would beg to differ, but I’ll let it go for now.”

Till opens his mouth to deliver a clever quip that would shut Ivan right up, something that’s a true testament to his intelligence, when he realizes that Ivan has a smear of clay over his eyebrow.

The world abruptly narrows down to the two of them, and Till’s eyes are pinned to the sight.

In the span of a second, Till has opened his mouth to wet the pad of his thumb with saliva. He reaches across the table and grabs Ivan’s face, squishing his cheeks together between his forefinger and thumb. Ivan’s eyes are *so* wide, darting to Till’s finger as he brings it to Ivan’s eyebrow and wipes the smear of clay away.

Ivan’s smile is frozen on his face. There’s a wet streak of Till’s saliva on his skin, glistening in the fluorescent light. Till scrubs harder. Ivan makes a soft noise.

Then, reality comes crashing back.

Till blinks when he realizes what he’s done. Ivan hasn’t taken a breath in a full minute. There are multiple people staring, which Till can’t really fault them for. Step-brothers don’t lick their fingers and lovingly wipe their saliva over each other’s faces. Well, they do in porn. Maybe. Till’s not an expert, Ivan is.

In ceramics class, it’s fucking *weird.* That’s what Till is trying to say.

“T-There,” Till wheezes. He needs to do something normal. So, he pats Ivan’s head in an extremely lame way, like he’s a dog. “All clean.”

Till can physically feel the blood rushing to his face, making him flush a deep, rosy red. His ears are burning. Across the room, Sena’s mouth is hanging open. Till is so dizzy, he thinks he might faint.

“N-Nothing like a pair of siblings bonding in ceramics class, right?” he asks Ivan loudly, mostly for show. It doesn’t occur to him that he’s making things infinitely worse, because Till has entered crisis mode. He tends to lose his cool when he’s flustered. He can admit that.

Ivan is great at handling situations like these. He’ll take the bone Till threw at him and say something suave and cool, and no one will be talking about this tomorrow. The rumor mill will target someone else. Like that guy who eats pizza with soy sauce during C lunch. Or maybe the creepy librarian.

Unfortunately, Ivan.exe has stopped working.

Ivan stares at Till like he's buffering. Thousand yard gaze. There's a critical system failure happening, Till is sure of it. He always knew Ivan was a robot in disguise, it would explain so much –

"Thank you, Till," Ivan says, clearly on autopilot. He hasn't blinked in so long. "I'm grateful for your saliva."

Is Ivan fucking serious right now? He's grateful for Till's saliva?

Everyone is staring, and that's all he could manage? Like Till just performed a noble, selfless act instead of the most deranged thing this art room has probably ever seen? Minus the students who fucked on this very table during the pep rally last week.

The class is dead silent save for the hum of the overhead lights. Even the art teacher is looking over her glasses at them. Funny. She's usually so unimpressed.

"That was very helpful," Ivan tries again.

Till, meanwhile, is on the verge of passing out. He's sweating a lot, vision swimming with embarrassment. "Right. You're welcome. T-That's what family is for. To, uh, clean each other's faces when there's… stuff." He winces. "Clay stuff. Not other stuff."

The picture Till has just painted isn't helpful. It puts to mind the image of Ivan jerking his cock over Till and spilling a load all over his face with a soft groan. Creamy and warm semen sticking to his eyelashes, clumping them together. Dripping down his cheeks to his pink lips, as Ivan milks the last few spurts from his cock. Making sure every last drop lands on his stepbrother's skin.

Ivan's so, like. Virile and healthy and stuff. He probably cums buckets. Till hates this train of thought so much.

Ivan finally blinks, successfully rebooting. Oh, good. He's going to fix this, Till thinks.

Ivan tacks on a slimy smile and turns to the teacher. There's a weird vein bulging on his temple. "Can I have permission to use the restroom?"

The teacher is still watching them owlishly. "Take the hall pass," she manages.

Ivan does not take the hall pass. He's out of the room as soon as the teacher gives him vague approval to leave.

And that's how Till finds himself alone at the table with twelve pairs of eyes boring a hole into his head. Ivan fucking *left.* He didn't even try to clean up Till's mess like he always does. Not that Till needs Ivan for anything, but it was still a monumental dick move to leave him here.

Till miserably buries his face into the table. Ivan's allowed to talk about Till's nail polish chips and phlegm without getting a single odd glance, but Till is a weirdo for wiping the clay from Ivan's face.

It's humbling to be the freak for once. The art teacher is probably mentally filing this incident away to tell her friends over wine later. Sena is whispering to her friend. If rumors spread – if Mizi hears about this – Till will super glue Sena's locker shut, he swears to god.

Ivan doesn't return. Till thinks it should earn him disciplinary action, but half the teaching staff is madly in love with him, so he gets special treatment. No surprises there.

By the time the bell rings, Till has made zero progress on his own project. Not that it matters. He could slap a lopsided lump of clay on the table and still score higher than Ivan's stupid square cup, provided the teacher doesn't take points off Till's grade for him being such a freak.

Till gathers his things and escapes into the crowded hallway. That cheerleader's boyfriend doesn't come and find him – Ivan must've talked the guy down during his stupid team breakfast last Saturday. It's a bummer, because Till was hoping to let off some steam and get in a fight.

Whatever. They always come looking for him eventually.

The walk home in the rain is miserable. Till has no idea where Ivan fucked off to, but his car isn't in the driveway or garage. He's pretty sure there isn't football practice today, so maybe Ivan's having glorious penetrative gay sex somewhere, who knows.

And *no,* the thought doesn't anger Till. If Ivan is sleeping around, then it's a good thing. Less freak behavior directed at Till.

Besides, he's still the only step-brother Ivan has, so in all likelihood, Ivan's not even into the imaginary sex he's having. He's probably got a beautiful blond twink under him, and Ivan's thinking, *ugh, what a chore, I wish this was Till's virgin asshole.*

Io isn't home from work yet. She texts Till and tells him that she'll be working late, so he should go out and grab a bite to eat with Ivan. Uh, yeah. Fat fucking chance. Ivan is currently MIA.

At least, that's what Till thinks until Ivan calls him an hour later. He's lucky Till just got out of the shower, or he wouldn't have heard his phone ring. And Ivan always gets so pissy whenever Till doesn't answer his calls, so he slides his thumb across the screen to answer.

Still annoyed about what happened during ceramics, Till grits out a low and angry, "What."

Ivan isn't even phased. "Hello to you too, Till."

"Fuck you," Till hisses.

"Are you offering?"

It's a completely normal comment for a freak like Ivan. Or, it would be. Now, Till is burdened with the knowledge that Ivan's ivansim stems from a deep and forbidden lust for

his younger stepbrother, so it's hard to brush Ivan off like Till would have done even just a week ago. And something about that makes Till want to be a little mean.

"I don't fuck losers," Till snaps, which isn't technically a lie. He hasn't fucked anybody yet, losers included. He glares up at the ceiling in his bedroom, still half-dressed. "Why are you calling me? I'm busy –"

"You've had sex?" Ivan asks quietly.

Pfft. Till bites back a laugh. Ivan can be so fucking pathetic sometimes. Till can't believe he fell for that. "What, are you jealous? I'm not telling you."

Silence.

Ivan's voice is deadly calm. "Who?"

Till blinks. He pulls his phone away to stare at the screen, eyebrows furrowed. He's known Ivan for the better part of a decade now, so he's gotten pretty familiar with Ivan-speak. That 'who' wasn't asking for vague details, like a hot redhead or a girl with a nice smile.

That 'who' is very clearly asking for a name, age, and possibly address, too.

No worries. Till can play it off. He'll just change the subject. "It's actually none of your fucking business. Anyway, where –"

"I asked you a question, Till."

Till would never willingly admit it, but Ivan can be fucking terrifying. At least they aren't having this weird conversation in person. This is quickly approaching cigarettes after school levels of weird for Ivan, and it's pissing Till off.

The hairs on the back of Till's neck stand up, and his skin breaks out in goosebumps. "Y-Yeah, I heard you the first time. I don't have to answer you."

Ivan isn't even bothering to suppress his freak. "Was it your guitar teacher?"

"What? No," Till replies, then squints at the ceiling. Wait. "You said she was a lesbian. Were you fucking lying to me?"

Ivan doesn't respond. "Please tell me," he says. "I'm asking nicely."

"Oh my god, Ivan. You're such a freak," Till breathes, already so fucking done with this conversation. "I was joking. My virgin body is untouched and pure."

…

"Good," Ivan sighs quietly into the receiver, possibly from relief. "That was mean, by the way."

"Uh, yeah. Did you forget who you're talking to?" Till asks. Fork found in kitchen, seriously.

“Never.”

Till crinkles his eyebrows, but he lets it go. “Whatever. Did you call for a reason, or am I suffering through this phone call for nothing?”

“We’re on our own tonight,” Ivan is saying, completely casual, like he wasn’t just vaguely threatening the imaginary people Till has slept with. “I was thinking about getting sushi for dinner.”

Fuck. Till can’t help but perk up. “You’re paying?”

Ivan’s low, smooth laugh rolls through the receiver, and it does *not* send a tingle down Till’s spine. “Have you ever paid when we go out, Till?”

“Fuck you,” Till snaps, embarrassed. He spends most of his allowance on clothes, piercings, or accessories, unlike Ivan, who saves his money for days like these. “You like paying. You’ve got this, like, perverse provider martyr complex. You’d thank me if I drained your wallet dry.”

Ivan doesn’t even bother denying it. “I would.”

“You’re a freak,” Till says.

“I think that word would have more impact if you used it less,” Ivan replies. Stupid smug bastard. “Can I suggest using psycho every now and then? That might be the one that hurts my feelings.”

Till wishes they were texting. Then, there would be a chance Ivan would get distracted while driving, and he’d crash the car and be put into a coma, and Till would never have to deal with him ever again. Io would be sad, but they could visit Ivan in the hospital sometimes. Once a month. Hopefully less.

“I hate you,” Till declares. “Also, crash the car and die.”

There’s a smile in Ivan’s voice. “I didn’t hear a please.”

Till hangs up. He has officially met his quota of ivanism for the day, but Ivan’s manipulative scheme to lure him out with sushi is working. Till feels a lot like a stray cat being coaxed out of a dumpster while Ivan is the one holding a piece of shrimp dangling from a string.

Ivan picks him up a few minutes later. They end up at the usual place – a little restaurant they go to so often, the staff know them by name. Which makes it sound like Till hangs out with Ivan a lot. He doesn’t, he swears. He just really likes sushi. This is not a weekly occurrence, so shut up about it.

They’re both sitting in a booth together. There’s a perfectly good seat right across from Till, but Ivan is glued to Till’s side, watching him play Super Smash Bros. on his Switch while they wait for their food. Neither of them bring up the ceramics incident.

“You’re using too many jabs,” Ivan says as Captain Falcon sends Till flying off screen for the second time. “You need to be shield blocking.”

“I am,” Till huffs. He’d shove Ivan away, but he’s locked in. “You can’t block grabs.”

“That wasn’t a grab. That was a special move.”

“Fuck off, you don’t know shit, that was definitely a grab –”

Till doesn’t even realize how close Ivan has gotten until his character – Meta Knight – is thrown off the map again, thus making him lose the game. He turns his head to tell Ivan off for distracting him, but he misjudged their proximity.

Ivan’s arm is thrown over the back of the booth behind Till, and they’re pressed together like they’re dating or something. Thighs touching, Till tucked against Ivan's chest, as they play a game together. Highschool sweethearts on a sushi date. And it’s even weirder that Till remembers sitting further away, and he realizes *he* was the one to scoot closer to Ivan.

Also, their noses are brushing. Till’s heart jumps to his throat. Like this, he can count each of Ivan’s ridiculous, thick eyelashes, and he can see the approximate moment Ivan notices how close they are too, because he inhales sharply.

“Holy fucking shit,” Till yelps, flying back until he hits the wall. He clutches his chest to fend off an impending heart attack. “What the fuck, Ivan? Why are you creeping up on me?”

Ivan blinks. “I haven’t moved the whole time we’ve been sitting, Till.”

“Yeah right.” Till is suddenly cold, and it takes him a moment to realize that he was soaking up Ivan’s body heat like a lizard. Fuck, was that a *cuddle?* “P-People are going to get the wrong idea.”

“What idea?” Ivan asks. Stupid snaggletooth smile and amused, crinkled eyes. Till hopes he gets wrinkles.

“Y-You know,” Till mutters, looking around conspiratorially. There are eyes everywhere. The walls have ears. Sena from ceramics class could be peeking through the window right now. “That I’m as much of a freak as you are. No one gives a shit when you beg for my phlegm, but it’s *different* for me, Ivan. I’m not popular or attractive.”

A little furrow appears between Ivan’s eyebrows. “Not attractive,” he repeats, and then he passes a hand over his face and lets out a little wheezing laugh. “Till, do you even listen to yourself sometimes?”

Till squints at him suspiciously. Sure, Ivan might want to bend him over, but he assumed that was because Ivan has a step-brother kink and a thing for emo twinks, not because he finds Till personally attractive. “What.”

“You play guitar,” Ivan elaborates. “And write music.”

Till snorts. “No shit, dumbass. What does that have to do with my face?”

“You draw and paint. I hear you singing at night.”

“Are you having a stroke,” Till asks.

“Health emergencies are common in my family,” Ivan answers mildly. “But no, I’m not having a stroke at this very moment. Do you really think you’re unattractive?”

“I mean, I guess? Wait, hold the fuck up, aren’t me and my mom your family?” Till asks, and then his brain catches up with what he’s saying. He hurriedly ducks his head. Ivan’s sitting at the end of the booth, so there’s no escape. “Not that I care. I don’t. Shut the fuck up.”

“I wasn’t talking,” Ivan says.

Till is considering crawling under the table to hide. “I said shut up.”

“I see I’ve upset you. Alright. Let me rephrase, because that was very cute,” Ivan begins, impressing Till with a very earnest stare, “The genetics I share with my deceased father, whom I no longer consider part of my family, make me prone to certain health conditions. My real family, which includes Till and his mother, is thankfully very healthy. Is that revision better?”

Till inches his fingers toward his chopsticks.

Ivan frowns when he notices. “Don’t stab me, Till. It would make Io sad.” His eyes light up. “Can I suggest spitting in my drink instead? You’re also free to kick me under the table, but only if you leave a bruise.”

“Fine,” Till hisses, reaching for Ivan’s water glass in a spur of the moment bad decision. “You want it that bad?”

Till is going to call Ivan’s bluff once and for all. He holds Ivan’s gaze, then opens his mouth and spits hard into Ivan’s drink. Lips shiny with his own saliva, he passes the glass back to Ivan, teal eyes bright with a challenge. There’s a murky glob of Till’s spit sitting directly on top of the ice.

“There,” Till says smugly, leaning back and crossing his arms. He impatiently taps his combat boot under the table. “Bottoms up, freak.”

Ivan is staring hard at the water. “I don’t remember it being my birthday,” he mumbles, like he’s deeply amazed at the sudden gift Till has bestowed on him.

Till laughs. This is fucking amazing. “You’re stalling. You won’t actually do it.”

Ivan’s going to have to tell the waitress what happened. He’s going to say something like, *my step-brother spit in my drink,* and the waitress will say, *oh, no worries, that’s what siblings do, I’ll get you another glass,* and Ivan will assume his slimy smile and ask, *does it come with your number?* Even though he’s fucking gay –

Without hesitation, Ivan picks up the glass, swirls the contents with his straw until the glob of spit breaks apart and is mixed in with the water, and then he takes a slow, deliberate sip. His

eyes are closed. Long, feathery eyelashes fanning over his cheekbones as his throat bobs around a swallow.

Till's jaw drops. There's Ivan being a freak, and then there's this. "You're actually fucking insane," he manages after Ivan gulps half of it down.

Ivan smiles giddily with the straw between his lips. "You've known that for years, Till."

"Yeah, but like…" Till is staring at the straw situated on top of Ivan's pink tongue. Every time he thinks he can win, Ivan proves him wrong. "I didn't think you'd actually drink it."

"Why wouldn't I?" Ivan asks, pausing to happily suck up some more water. "It's from you. I think it tastes sweeter now. Do you want to try?"

"You're so fucking gross," Till snaps. His cheeks are burning. Does this count as swapping spit? Is it worse? Fuck, his first kiss is indirectly Ivan of all fucking people.

Ivan hums. "I never said I wasn't. But you gave it to me willingly, so doesn't that make you worse?"

Till glares at him. "I hate you. I hope you aspirate, asshole." He's seconds away from grabbing his switch and diving back into his game just to avoid the nightmare that is Ivan.

"Would you perform mouth to mouth?" Ivan asks, looking way too interested.

"I'd finish the job, freak."

Ivan laughs, but their food finally arrives, cutting off whatever weird bullshit he was about to spew. Till tears into his sushi like a feral cat, because dealing with Ivan tends to work up his appetite. He also might have a weakness for sushi – and fish in general – but it's mostly Ivan's fault. He's also determined to pretend the last five minutes didn't happen.

But of course Ivan has to ruin it.

"You should do that more often," Ivan says, breaking a piece of his sushi roll in half with his chopsticks. He eats like a psychopath, always tearing his food apart before bringing it to his mouth.

Cheeks full, Till looks up and asks, "What?"

"Be physically mean to me," Ivan says casually, like he's suggesting Till try a new hobby instead of the thing he's already been doing for the better part of seven years. "My shin is still unbruised. Or… you could try tickling me again. Just a suggestion."

Till chokes on a piece of tuna. He coughs violently and slams a hand against his chest to try and dislodge it. Ivan reaches over to thump him on the back a little *too* hard, smiling. Just a suggestion, Ivan says. Till can't believe him.

"You're so fucking weird," he rasps once he can breathe.

Ivan is a serious pervert. He's acting innocent, but Till knows he isn't ticklish. Ivan gets hard when Till touches him, because he wants to destroy his virgin hole, and here he is, asking to be "tickled" in public. It's obscene even for a freak like him.

Ivan is so fucking sly. How long has this maniac been manipulating Till like this? Fuck, Till doesn't want to know. His whole life has been a lie. Nevermind the fact that a frankly worrying part of him wants to see if Ivan really would pop a boner in the middle of this restaurant.

"I can't help being ticklish," Ivan says with a little pout. He's such a loser.

"Psycho," Till says immediately. He needs to get away from Ivan, like, yesterday. "Absolute fucking psycho. I'm going to the restroom."

Ivan stands so Till can get up, and then he tries following him.

"Alone," Till hisses, pushing Ivan back to his seat. "And don't even think about spitting in my drink while I'm gone, Ivan. I'll know, and I'll key your fucking car until it's ruined."

Ivan frowns at Till's soda, clearly thwarted. "If you insist. Have a safe trip."

Till flips him off.

It's been four days since Till discovered hardcore gay stepbrother porn on Ivan's laptop.

Coincidentally, Till has not jacked off in the same amount of time. It's safer that way, because Till won't be crossing any invisible lines. He doesn't know what he'd fantasize about in the moment, but he's pretty sure his mind would drift to Ivan. And he is being *so* normal about that, actually.

"You seem distracted," Liz says during Till's guitar lesson. "Something on your mind, Till?"

Yeah, my stepbrother's cock, Till thinks. Liz's cleavage is directly in his line of sight, and he's thinking about Ivan. Fuck. It's over for him.

Till ducks his head and averts his gaze. "N-Nothing. Just, uh. This chord is tricky, you know?"

"Nah." Liz leans over his shoulder, and the smell of her perfume assaults Till's senses. "You've done it before – here, let me show you."

Liz is touching him. She's gently moving Till's fingers into the correct position on the fretboard, and her long black hair is tickling his cheek. If he looked to his right, his vision would be totally filled with her generous cleavage. She's never really worn a lot of clothes. Winter must be hard for her.

Till blushes to the roots of his hair. There's no escape. He hopes she doesn't notice how sweaty his fingers have gotten. "L-Like this?"

Do not pop a boner in the middle of your guitar lesson, Till chants in his mind. *Do not pop a boner. Do not pop a boner. Do not –*

Liz finally steps away. “Yeah, you’ve got it. Try it now.”

Till manages to shakily strum his guitar. A perfect F minor chord rings out, and Liz offers Till one of her small, reserved smiles. Thin lips, black lipstick. She’s so cool. Unfortunately, Ivan has poisoned Till’s mind and possibly turned him gay without even being, like, consciously aware he did it.

Also, Till is hard. His sexuality is so confused.

“I need to go,” he manages, quickly packing up his guitar and capo before she sees his situation.

“Listen, Till, if Wednesdays aren’t working for you…”

“Wednesdays are fine,” Till rushes to say, using his guitar case as cover while he creeps toward the door to freedom. “I’ll… Bye.”

Till doesn’t bother asking Ivan for a ride. His boner goes down while he’s walking home, and he spends approximately four minutes in his room, staring at the ceiling, before his dick gets hard again. Stupid fucking Ivan. This is all his fault.

Usually, Till prefers to wait until night to jerk off, but he’s actually dying here. He needs to cum so bad, it feels like he’s going to burst.

Till is already pitching a tent in his tight jeans, and he unzips them to pull his underwear down just enough to free his cock. He’s so hard that his dick immediately slaps against his flat stomach, dripping precum onto his skin.

What would Ivan do if he saw Till like this? It’s a funny thought. He’d probably have a stroke if he came in and saw Till sitting in bed with his dick out, holding the hem of his T-shirt between his teeth as he pumps his dry cock.

Wait. He’s not supposed to be thinking about Ivan right now. Till swallows and stares at his own bony, pale hand wrapped around his dripping length. He tries to imagine a girl jerking him off, but every time he’s getting into it, his brain turns it into Ivan’s hand.

Fuck. Maybe he can just… experiment a little. It’s fine. It’s not a big deal.

Till finds his phone under his blanket. He hesitates for a moment, staring at the glowing screen as his fingers hover over the search bar. His heart beats wildly in his chest, thundering against his rib cage until he finally bites the bullet and presses enter.

Then, he’s suddenly presented with thumbnails of sweaty muscles, hard cocks, and cum-filled assholes. And it’s not immediately revolting, so Till scrolls down, his thumb moving too fast for him to really process any of it until a thumbnail catches his eye – a guy with dark hair pinning a skinny twink down, both of them flushed and panting.

Till bites his lip. It's just porn. It's not weird. No one will even know.

The moans start immediately once Till clicks the video. His heart jumps to his throat, and he scrambles to turn the volume down, fumbling for his airpods. He really hopes no one heard that. He's glad he doesn't share a wall with Ivan, because Ivan knocking on his door is the last thing he needs right now.

Despite his panic, Till's dick is still hard. He resumes watching the video.

The top has the same build as Ivan. Lean and muscular, and the sight makes Till's cock drip onto his stomach. His eyes are glued to the screen. He watches the top lovingly squeeze the bottom's ass, dipping his thumbs between his cheeks to rub lube over his pink hole.

A fluttery thrill runs down Till's spine. Unconsciously, he clenches down on nothing as the top in the video slicks up his huge cock, then positions the fat head against the bottom's ass. Till watches Ivan's – fuck, the top's – dick slip inside the other guy, the slide smooth and easy, until his heavy balls meet the back of the bottom's thighs.

The bottom lets out a high-pitched moan, rocking back to meet the top's slow thrusts. The sounds he's making are ridiculous – he's gotta be faking it, right? There's no way he's actually enjoying being speared on ten inches of dick, guts stuffed so full he's probably aching.

Suddenly, the bottom tenses up and clutches a pillow as he cums, which pretty much answers Till's question. A huge dick up your ass can feel pretty great, apparently.

Then, the top gets a little mean. He grabs a fistful of the bottom's hair and starts thrusting harder, using his grip as leverage to target his thrusts in specific way, probably pounding the guy's prostate to mush. The bottom is openly sobbing his moans out now, begging for *harder, faster, fuck, that's it, right there, so rough! –*

Till watches, wide-eyed, as the bottom's cock dribbles cum again.

The top laughs breathlessly. He smacks the bottom's ass hard and resumes thrusting, fucking him dirty and fast. The poor bottom is barely coherent anymore, clutching the pillow for dear life as the top pounds into his poor, abused hole, clearly chasing his own pleasure now.

Till's own cock is drooling, making the slide easy and smooth as he furiously pumps his length in time with the top's thrusts. He's biting his bottom lip so hard, he can taste blood.

It's easy to lose himself in the rhythm of it. The slick sounds from his headphones are blending with his own movements. It's too easy, really, because suddenly it's not the video he's picturing anymore.

Ivan.

Oh, fuck. It's a point of no return, and Till doesn't even try to look back.

Till thinks about Ivan after he's played a game of football, his dark, inky hair plastered to his forehead with sweat. Thinks about Ivan's hard cock rearranging his tiny guts, carving out a

space for himself deep in Till's body. His thrusts mean and harsh, almost selfish, as he loses control and takes what he's always wanted from his younger step-brother.

That's it, Ivan would murmur hoarsely in Till's ear, almost lovingly, as he thrusts balls-deep into Till's tight ass. *Good boy, Till. You're taking me so well. You were made for this. Made for me. You feel so good.*

On screen, the top groans, slams inside, and pumps the bottom full of his load, completely undone.

"Fuck," Till gasps, eyes scrunched shut. His own climax slams into him harder than he'd expected. Thick ropes of cum spurt from Till's cock, making a mess of his stomach. He passes a hand over his mouth to stifle himself. "F-Fuck, Ivan, fuck!"

When it's over, Till lies there for a long moment, staring at the ceiling again. He's breathless and literally *shaking* from the intensity of his orgasm, which has never happened before. His limbs don't want to work anymore. He's become boneless.

I'm gay, Till thinks hysterically. *I'm gay for Ivan.*

Fuck, Till can't deal with this right now. He just can't. He's already panicking.

After cleaning up the mess, he cracks open his window and slides his skateboard down the roof until it rolls onto the ground below. One of Till's many skills is sneaking out – the perks of being a delinquent – so he steps out of the open window and shuts it behind him, then meanders down the roof until he can jump onto the neighbor's maple tree.

Till is just dusting off his knees on solid ground when he realizes he forgot his phone, but whatever. It's not like anyone texts him anyway. He needs to get away from Ivan's general vicinity right now, before Till asks him to take his virginity and fuck him stupid.

The skate park is almost completely empty save for a few stoners. Till nods in greeting. He'll probably end up sharing a bowl or two with them later, but now he just needs to feel the air on his face. He tackles the mini-ramp first, warming up before he moves onto the half-pipe.

Till skates around for a few hours until he scrapes his elbow raw on the concrete, and then he sits on the grass by the wire fence with the stoners. The conversation is fucking boring, but it's better than moping in bed, thinking about Ivan's stupid dick.

The sun has begun to set. Till tips his head back to stare at the orange sky until a man twice his age passes him the bowl, and then he takes a few greedy puffs. The rest of the stoners have moved on, but at least there's a straggler willing to chill with Till.

"You really shouldn't be smoking like this with strangers, man," the guy is saying, taking a hit himself. "People lace bowls all the time. You're like, what? Fourteen?"

"What the fuck? I'm obviously sixteen." Till is still staring at the sky, admiring the swirls of purple in the orange. He'd probably be a lot angrier if he weren't so stoned. He squints. Wait.

“Dude, are you going to kidnap me?”

The guy laughs. His eyes are so bloodshot, it’s almost scary. “Nah. I’ve already got someone tied up in my basement. Might get crowded.”

Even the creepy weed guy at the skate park is rejecting Till, fucking fantastic. At least it isn’t a lesbian this time. Till takes a deep hit and coughs it out, waving the smoke away with his hand. Adult weed is so strong compared to the shit Till normally smokes after school with the other delinquents.

“How much for the bag?” Till asks after an awkward silence. He’ll have to hide it from Ivan, but whatever.

“More than your allowance,” the stoner replies with a hoarse laugh. “Seriously, man. Make better choices. Pretty boy like you, someone’s gonna throw you in the back of a van if you’re not careful.”

Yeah. Fucking Ivan, maybe.

“My stepbrother’s gay,” Till blurts.

The guy blinks at him. “Congrats?”

“No, like,” Till begins, coasting along the edge of *too* high, “I’m pretty sure the freak bastard is into me.”

“I think you’ve had enough,” says the stoner, plucking the bowl from Till’s cold fingers. “Just because your brother is gay doesn’t mean he wants you, man. Grow up.”

Till’s life has gone so downhill that he’s being chastised by a man in his late twenties smoking weed in a skate park with a teenager. If he weren’t currently higher than a cloud, he probably would have punched the guy by now. As it stands, Till’s limbs are jelly. He has no idea how he’s going to get home like this.

Till sinks down into the grass. He probably looks like a puddle. Or maybe a worm. Haha, Ivan would probably be into that. He’s such a freak. He’d salivate over Till’s writhing worm body. Fuck, does that make them stepworms?

“Uh,” stoner guy is saying, once Till finally remembers he’s there, “Your brother. Black hair, varsity jacket?”

“What?” Till asks, peeking open an eye. He props himself up on his bad elbow, then hisses and flops back down. “Dude, what the hell. Are you having psychic visions?”

“No, man. I gotta get out of here. That guy looks *pissed.* ”

Till has no idea what the guy’s deal is. He can hear him climbing the fence and taking the bowl with him as he leaves, the bastard. That was supposed to be Till’s weed. He was going to convince the guy to sell it to him, but he forgot.

“Till.”

Holy shit. The guy really did lace the bowl, because Till *swears* he can hear Ivan’s voice. He pulls his beanie down over his eyes and giggles, still laying on the grass. “Hello, ghost Ivan, I’m puddle Till… or maybe I’m a worm, pfft…”

Ghost Ivan is quiet for a long moment. “This… is a new low,” he says eventually.

Woah. There’s no way anyone could mimic how Ivan sounds when he’s genuinely angry, since Till is the only one who knows. Till cracks a lopsided grin and pulls the hat up so he can stare at what is probably Real Ivan.

He’s suddenly grateful for the weed. He’d be freaking out more if he weren’t high – Till literally had one of the best orgasms in his life a few hours ago while imagining Ivan’s dick inside of him.

“Don’t be so fucking pissy, Ivan, I seriously can’t fight you right now,” Till manages, weakly waving a hand to demonstrate. “Come back tomorrow. I’ll still be here. Probably.”

Ivan’s shadow is tall and imposing, blocking out the glow of the street lights. “Get up,” he says, tone clipped. There’s no trace of slime on his face. Just disappointment. Isn’t Till lucky?

Till squints up at Ivan from under his beanie. Ivan looks scary. Like, scary scary. Cigarettes after school scary, maybe worse. He’s not being overbearing or weird or clingy. His jaw is clenched tight, and his eyes are doing that thing where they appear like black voids, not a trace of warmth or emotion in them.

“I can’t,” Till tells him honestly, tugging the beanie down over his eyes again, “too high. So fuck off, stupid Ivan.”

Ivan exhales through his nose. Slowly. Then, without a word or fucking warning, he crouches down, wraps an arm around Till’s waist, and tosses him over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes. Till yelps and slams his fists into Ivan’s back, hissing and sputtering.

“What the fuck are you doing, you fucking freak? Let me go, I swear to fucking god, Ivan, I’ll kill you –”

“Do you have any idea how worried your mom is?” Ivan asks suddenly, interrupting him.

Till freezes mid punch, narrowing his eyes. This is a bluff, right? “You’re full of shit. I wasn’t even gone that long.”

Ivan’s arm tightens around Till’s waist, but Till can’t even be bothered. It’s kind of humiliating that he weighs so little to Ivan. Stupid freak strength.

“You really have no idea,” Ivan says flatly.

“Yeah,” Till replies, staring at the ground from his comfortable perch on Ivan’s shoulder, “Because you’re not making any fucking sense, dumbass.”

Ivan's voice is deadly quiet. "Do you want me to recount the last four hours from me and Io's point of view, Till?"

Till rolls his eyes. He's too stoned to deal with this freak right now. "Stop being so fucking dramatic. You could have – oh."

He forgot his fucking phone.

"Yes, oh." Ivan's never sounded more bitchy in his life. Till wonders what kind of expression he's making – he's still thrown over Ivan's shoulder as he hauls Till across the parking lot, so he can't see. "First, you disappear without a trace. Io and I tried calling you, but can you guess what happened next?"

Till's heart pangs in his chest. Fuck Ivan, but his poor mom. "You found it ringing in my room."

"Correct."

They finally make it to the car. Ivan sets Till into the passenger seat, and then he's really fucking close. Ivan's silky black hair is tickling Till's face, and it takes a few moments for his weed brain to realize that Ivan is buckling his seatbelt. Ivan is so fed up with him that he isn't even going to bother asking Till to buckle himself in.

Ivan is *seriously* pissed this time.

Till bites his bottom lip. "I didn't…"

"You didn't realize?" Ivan finishes for him after he settles into the driver's seat. All calm and capable, polished and smooth.

"It's not like that," Till tries. His head is swimming, and he can't deal with Ivan when he's sober, let alone like this. "I didn't fucking disappear. I was here, alright?" He crosses his arms and sinks into the seat, glaring at the window. "Safe and sound, so get off my back about it."

"Safe and sound?" Ivan repeats after a long pause. "Stoned out of your mind, lying in the dirt with a man who could have drugged you or worse? That's your idea of safe?"

Well. When put like that, it does seem like Till was in danger. Ivan can be so – so fucking *dramatic* sometimes.

"I fucked up, okay?" Till slips his fingers under his beanie and tugs at his hair. "Is that what you want me to say?"

"No, Till." Ivan shoots a quick text to someone. Probably Io to inform her that her son is alive after all, and then he presses the button to start the car. "I don't want anything from you right now."

"Ivan. I'll apologize to my mom for making her worry –"

"And me?" Ivan asks. There's no inflection in his tone. "Do I get an apology too?"

Till is high. High and stupid, and that's making him angry and confused. He stares at Ivan uncomprehendingly. There's no right answer here. Ivan will be his usual freak self no matter what Till says, so he doesn't even try.

"Is that, like, a trick question?" Till asks fuzzily. Why would Ivan even want one?

Ivan closes off. It's kind of surreal to watch it happen in real time. If Till thought Ivan looked cold before, then that doesn't hold a candle to his expression right now. Entirely devoid of expression or feeling, eyes slipping shut for a brief moment like he expected this answer and is simply coming to terms with it.

Till feels like he's missing something. He'll never understand Ivan. Story of his fucking life, right?

"You don't think," Ivan says. "You never think, Till."

Till happens to think a lot actually, and that's his problem. Right now, he's thinking about opening the passenger door and crawling to safety. He's still thinking about Mizi's rejection, still thinking about the stepbrother porn he found on Ivan's laptop. The fact that Till just jerked off to gay porn himself a few hours ago.

The weed was supposed to help him *stop* thinking, and look where that's gotten him.

Fuck. He was so stupid. Looking at Ivan now, it's becoming increasingly obvious that Till royally fucked up this time, but it's Ivan. He'll get over it like he always does, and he'll pester Till during ceramics tomorrow, and Till will shove this whole fucking evening to the back of his mind.

For once, Till has nothing to say. No swears, no insults. He just sits there and stares out the window, watching the world blur past. He refuses to cry. It'll make his eyeliner run, that's all.

Io doesn't end up grounding Till, most likely because she's an angel and Till genuinely does not deserve her. She pulls him into a tearful hug once he steps through the front door, begging him to at least leave a note next time. She doesn't ask why he smells like weed, or why his eyes are bloodshot.

Till mumbles an apology into her shoulder. He thinks she'll forgive him.

Ivan, though. He drove off the moment he saw Till enter the house.

He'll get over it. Ivan always does. Till wouldn't care even if he didn't, so it's no sweat off his back.

It's fine. Everything is fine.

Chapter End Notes

yes, ivan popped a boner during ceramics class. what he did in the restroom is left to interpretation, however.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

> Once everyone in the room is looking at him, Till stares at the teacher, opens his mouth, and says *very* deliberately, “Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Everything is not fine.

That becomes abundantly clear bright and early Thursday morning when Till walks outside and finds Ivan’s car missing.

He pauses, staring at the conspicuously empty spot where it’s usually parked. The freak himself is also absent, and it takes Till a full minute to process the fact that Ivan left for school without him.

Till takes a deep breath. Maybe Ivan just… left to jog the track before school. He does that all the time like the stupid freak jock he is. There are a million things Ivan could be doing right now other than avoiding Till.

But… Ivan always comes back for Till no matter where he runs off to in the morning. Even if he refuses, Ivan at least makes sure Till knows the offer on the table, especially now that the weather’s cold.

Did Ivan even… come home last night after dropping Till off? Till can’t remember hearing Ivan’s car pull into the driveway.

Whatever. It doesn’t fucking matter. He doesn’t care what Ivan is doing right now. Maybe he’s having sex with that hypothetical blond twink again, who knows. Not Till, and that’s a good thing. He wouldn’t have it any other way.

“Hey, mom,” he says two minutes later, skating down the road toward school while holding his phone to his ear. “Ivan came back last night, didn’t he? Like, he isn’t dead?”

“Oh, I hope not. He seemed fine this morning when he called me,” Io replies. “Were you worried about your brother?”

“No! I don’t care what happens to that freak,” Till hisses immediately, flushing bright red. Then, he pauses. “Wait, he called you? So he really didn’t come home?”

“He told me he wanted to stay at a friend’s house last night,” Io explains. “I figured he needed some space. He was really worried about you, Till. We both were. I don’t think I’ve ever seen Ivan so anxious.”

Ivan, anxious? No way. Till doubts Ivan’s ever had an anxious thought in his life, because he’s a psychopath who hides it beneath a layer of princely polish. Everything is a manipulative game to him, so Till is categorically not buying it. Ivan might have fooled Io, but he can’t fool Till.

“Maybe he’s just stressed about the game tomorrow,” Till manages lamely. Even he can’t stand the bullshit spewing from his mouth right now. “He’ll get over it. That’s what he always does.”

“That’s unkind, Till,” Io says sharply, and Till’s heart sinks. “Maybe he’ll get over it on his own, but what you did was hurtful to us both.”

7:04am, and tears are pricking Till’s eyes, fucking fantastic. He scrubs them away and glares at the cracked pavement. “I didn’t ask him to worry about me.”

“You didn’t ask me to worry about you either, but you still apologized. Why is it different for Ivan?”

Till’s throat is dry, and it hurts to swallow. He fumbles for an excuse that doesn’t sound like complete garbage. “Cause you’re – you’re my mom, and he’s –”

Ivan.

“Your brother,” Io finishes, gentle but insistent. “And he loves you.”

She makes it sound so simple, like Ivan loving Till is some irrefutable fact, but it’s not true.

Ivan ignored Till for three whole years, pretending like he didn’t exist. And it probably says a lot about Till that he’s still upset about it, but where was *Ivan’s* apology? When did he ever fucking say he was sorry for shunning Till?

Spoiler: he didn’t. He never apologized. It’s worse, actually, because Ivan pretends like those three years never happened. Pretends like he’s such a good older brother, like he’d never hurt Till, which is a big fat lie. And it’s terrifying. He doesn’t want to get close to Ivan again. It’s all he can do to maintain the small distance between them now.

Till’s scared, alright? He knows how this story ends.

Ivan came into his life, loved him fiercely, and then abandoned him like he was an old, boring toy. Sue him for wanting to spare himself of that distinct pleasure again.

“I…” Till begins, but he doesn’t know where he was going with that.

Io sighs softly. “Think about it, okay? I know it’s hard, but it would mean a lot to him if you apologized.”

“Okay,” Till says, because it’s easier than telling her the truth. He sniffs to clear his running nose and wipes the remaining wetness from his eyes. “I love you, mom.”

“Oh, Till. I love you too. So, so much.” Io pauses for a moment. “You can stay home today if you need some time to process things. I can tell you’re going through something right now. You know I’m here to talk, right?”

“I know,” Till replies miserably. How could he possibly explain to his sweet, innocent mom that the two boys she raised with her blood, sweat, and tears turned out to be so fucking *twisted?*

The guilt is going to eat him alive at this rate. Has Ivan been feeling this way for… however long he’s liked Till? That’s insane, and it somehow makes Till feel even worse. He didn’t *know.*

Ivan never fucking says anything. Ever. He’ll just suffer in silence, because he’s taken it upon himself to bear the weight of everything without letting anyone help.

He’s so annoying. Till can’t stand him.

“I’ll go,” Till says. He’s already en route, and it isn’t like this day can get any shittier, right?

Wrong.

Till tells himself that he’s making a big deal out of nothing. It’s not like he cares if Ivan’s still pissy at him. Honestly, a reprieve from Ivan’s freakiness would be a fucking blessing.

Ivan will cave eventually, and they’ll make up and play Minecraft or something, and Ivan will sabotage Till and send both of their characters into a pit of lava, then feign innocence, and Till will threaten Ivan with bodily harm before they pass out on Till’s bed together like last week.

It’s a waiting game. That’s all this is.

Till goes about his day like normal. He doodles during algebra, sketches during gym, and eats the sandwich Io packed him for lunch. By the time the bell rings for eighth period, he’s pretty confident Ivan will have gotten over the stick up his ass by now.

At least, that’s what he thinks until he walks into the art room and finds their usual table empty. Till stares at Ivan’s vacant chair, and that weird feeling from this morning is suddenly back with a vengeance.

Ivan always gets here first. Always. His locker is literally right down the hall, not that you need books or anything for fucking ceramics.

The bell rings while Till is standing in the doorway like an idiot. Ivan is either late for the first time in his life, or he’s not coming.

Till swallows down a wave of… something. Annoyance. Frustration. Definitely not anything resembling concern. This continues to be Not A Big Deal. He tells himself that as he sits down and holds his phone under the table. He scrolls through his messages until he finds Ivan's name, and then he hesitates, biting his lip.

Eventually, he decides to go for something casual.

Till (2:17): *Where r u?*

There. Perfect. A simple inquiry, nothing more. Nothing lame or needy about it. Till is extremely proud of himself.

Except Ivan doesn't reply. Till stares at his phone screen for the better part of five minutes, but there's no response. Ivan saw the message almost as soon as Till sent it, so he must be ignoring him on purpose.

Fuck this. Ivan isn't the type to skip, so something must be up. Till spends approximately two minutes stewing and worrying before he finally caves and asks the art teacher where Ivan went.

"He came in earlier today to ask if he could use this period to practice for the game tomorrow," the art teacher informs him. She doesn't seem particularly happy that Till is in her vicinity, but he's not special. She pretty much hates everyone. "He's a model student, so I figured there was no harm in letting him."

Till furrows his eyebrows. Figures that Ivan could offer any lame excuse to the teacher to get out of class, but god forbid Till swear five times.

"What about his project?" Till asks after a long pause.

"He told me he put it in the kiln already," she replies, already turning back to her computer. "*Some* people don't wait until the last minute to complete their work, Till. You should be more like your brother."

Till can't even be bothered with her right now, but it is sort of rich how she's talking about work when she's currently scrolling through Pinterest.

Whatever. He has bigger fish to fry, because there's no way Ivan finished his shitty square cup. Not that it would have gotten a good grade anyway.

Projects have to be finished by the end of the period on Thursdays. All ceramics are fired in the kiln overnight, then graded on Fridays. Next week, they'll be tasked with sanding and glazing their projects, so it's really two grades in one. If you fuck up this stage, you've pretty much earned yourself two F's.

And Ivan didn't even try. He threw his grade away just to avoid Till, which is… seriously fucked up. Perfect, straight A student Ivan, who has probably never gotten a B in his entire academic career. Two F's would ruin him. His title as future valedictorian is at risk.

It's all Till's fault, at least partly. He'd be a moron to deny that fact. It's an insane cause and effect; Till smoked a bowl with a stranger, and now Ivan's academic future is uncertain.

Honestly, what the fuck.

Till casts a quick glance toward the clock on the far wall. He has approximately thirty minutes left until the bell rings, so he doesn't waste any time. He already knows what he has to do. He has to make this up to Ivan. He just has to. He won't let this be a catalyst for another three years of being shunned and ignored.

The first thing Till does is wedge the clay. He needs to do it himself to ensure that there aren't any air pockets – this is for Ivan's grade, after all.

Till can't fuck this up. He's a mess of sticky, wet clay by the end, but he's pretty confident with the result.

Then, he molds the clay into a delicate cup shape. It isn't easy to do without a wheel, but that wasn't part of the assignment, so he has to rely on his own skill. After he's finished, he adds a handle when everything is smoothed out.

It's already the best project in the class, but Till isn't done. He carefully uses a craft knife to imprint intricate details into the clay, adding lines and patterns for texture. He's taken enough art classes to know the teacher's tastes, and plain isn't going to work here.

Twenty-nine minutes later, Till finishes in just the nick of time. Normally, he'd take a picture of his work to admire later, but he doesn't have a moment to spare. There's only one thing left to do to complete his plan. There simply isn't time to question himself.

Seconds before the bell rings, Till stands up. The legs of his chair scrape loudly against the linoleum tile, drawing attention.

Once everyone in the room is looking at him, Till stares at the teacher, opens his mouth, and says *very* deliberately, "Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck."

Several mouths fall open to gawk at him, which is saying something. Till cusses a lot, and this is insane even for him. There will definitely be people talking about this tomorrow. Maybe it'll reach Mizi's ears, but for once, Till can't find it in himself to care.

This is all for Ivan. He better be fucking grateful. And he better not ignore Till for another three years.

"Detention," the art teacher says after her initial surprise, and Till pretends to look annoyed.

This time, Till is tasked with cleaning the store rooms while the art teacher continues to scroll through Pinterest. He's grateful for whatever is grabbing her attention there, because it gives him the opportunity to slip into the kiln room.

Unfortunately, Ivan's square cup is at the very bottom of the kiln. Till has to unload everything, fish it out, and then he takes a moment to stare at it.

It's objectively awful. Everything about Ivan's square cup is a crime against art and humanity as a whole. The shape, the rough texture, the cracked handle.

Suddenly, he remembers Ivan's earnest expression yesterday when he'd asked for Till's opinion. Eyebrows raised, gaze hopeful, snaggletooth protruding over his bottom lip. Like a stupid, eager dog.

What do you think? Ivan had asked.

Till takes a good long look at the square cup and decides that it doesn't have a single redeeming quality. That's what he thinks. But he carefully sets it aside all the same, because what it lacks in craftsmanship, it apparently makes up for in sentimental value.

Ugh. Ivan's turned Till into such a useless sap.

After carving Ivan's initials onto the bottom of the cup Till sculpted, he loads the kiln exactly as it had been, then leaves to help the custodian mop the floor.

Embarrassingly, Till's gotten pretty acquainted with the guy from the sheer number of times he's been punished and forced to clean after school.

"Detention again, Till?" the custodian asks, sighing.

Till peevishly reaches for a broom. "It was actually on purpose this time."

"I'm sure it was," the custodian laughs, then leans against his mop to consider Till. "At this point, we should get you your own cleaning cart. What do you say?"

"Ha ha," Till says, rolling his eyes as he begins sweeping the floor. He knows the drill by now.

They make good time. The cool thing about this guy is that he doesn't make small talk, and Till is infinitely grateful because he's already in a bad mood, and he'd feel like shit if he took it out on a random person.

Honestly, the work isn't so bad. It helps keep Ivan off his mind, so he isn't complaining.

Later, the custodian buys Till a soda at the vending machine for helping and tells him to stay out of trouble, which Till will not be doing, but he does appreciate the gesture.

After Till has served his sentence, a group of delinquents offer him a cigarette when he leaves the school, but he isn't in the mood for once – actually, that's a fat fucking lie.

After the stress of discovering stepbrother porn on Ivan's computer, realizing they're both gay, and whatever the hell is happening between them now, Till would give his right arm for a cigarette to destress. But Ivan is already pissed at him, and he doesn't want a repeat of last night.

"Maybe next time," Till says, staring longingly at the cigarette between the girl's fingers. "Gotta get home."

There's football practice today. Till can hear people in the bleachers as he walks past, but it's really Coach Carter's screaming that cements the fact. Ivan's over there, and Till could stop by to try talking to him. But he's also terrified that Ivan might brush him off again, so he doesn't.

He's not being a coward. He's just… giving Ivan some space. It's the smart thing to do. That's all.

Dinner is awkward.

They're having salmon tonight. Normally, that's Till's favorite, but it's hard to have an appetite when the tension in the air is so thick it could be cut with a knife. They're all seated at the kitchen table, except Ivan is sitting across from Till rather than right next to him.

"How was practice?" Io asks Ivan after the silence becomes unbearable.

Ivan is currently cutting his salmon fillet into neat, bite-sized pieces, which is all wrong. Ivan always gives half of his to Till. Always.

"Good. I think we have a shot at beating the Wildcats, but our best running back sprained his ankle yesterday, so we'll have to adjust our strategy."

"Oh, no," Io says. "I hope he's alright."

Till stabs his salmon with his fork. Ivan hasn't spared him a glance since they sat down, and it's… annoying. Only mildly.

"He'll recover," Ivan replies after mechanically eating a bite of rice. "Coach was upset, but we'll shape up for tomorrow."

Till snorts. Upset is an understatement. He heard the guy screaming from 100 yards away, but he chooses not to comment. Instead, he shoves his rice around on his plate, glowering at nothing. At this point, he almost hopes Ivan will lose tomorrow's football game. This entire situation is getting fucking stupid.

Io frowns when she notices. "Till, please eat your dinner. You're so thin."

"Not hungry," Till mutters, still toying with his food.

"Just a few bites," Io encourages, raising her eyebrows. "For me?"

Till never stood a chance. For his mom? Fucking anything, honestly. He cuts his salmon and takes a bite. It tastes amazing, but no surprises there. Io could throw random ingredients into a pan and it would still be delicious, because he lucked out and ended up with, objectively speaking, the best mom *ever.*

Suddenly, Till gets an idea. If Ivan won't talk to him, then he'll just force it. Ivan can never resist being a freak when it comes to Till. He's like an addict. It's a *fix* for him.

Till finishes chewing, turns to Ivan, and casually asks, “Can you pass me the salt, please?”

Ivan is going to say something freakish like, *oh, Till, you really shouldn’t, my notes say your sodium intake is slightly up since yesterday,* or it’s going to be something so unimaginably insane, Till can’t even try to anticipate it. Ivan is always surprising him.

Except Ivan doesn’t say anything.

He doesn’t glance up, doesn’t tease Till, doesn’t do anything except reach for the salt shaker, pass it across the table, and go right back to his meal like a normal person would. And for some reason, it kind of feels like a slap to the face. Or a punch to the gut.

For a second, Till just stares at him. The freak didn’t even *look.*

Something hot and ugly claws up Till’s throat, and he has to grip the salt shaker tight to stop himself from throwing it at Ivan’s stupid, perfect face. He’s so handsome. He must feel Till’s eyes burning a hole into the side of his head, but he pretends not to notice.

Fine. *Fine.* If Ivan wants to ignore Till, then whatever. Till is officially done caring about the whole fucking situation. Two can play this game. He’ll just ignore Ivan harder. He’s going to be *so* nonchalant and cool about this, and Ivan will grovel at his feet tomorrow, begging Till to pay attention to him. But he won’t. He’ll give Ivan a taste of his own medicine, because this fucking – fucking – *sucks* —

“Till, baby,” Io says from across the table, setting down her silverware with a frown, “are you crying?”

Till blinks. Unconsciously, he reaches up and discovers that he is, in fact, crying. His fingertips are wet with tears, and there’s plenty more where that came from, because when has Till only cried *just a little?*

Crybaby. That’s what Ivan used to call him when they were kids. Funny how some things change, while others stay the exact same. And the worst part?

Ivan looks up for a brief, tiny moment, and their eyes meet. Lock. Till stares at him through a sea of wet, angry tears, but there’s a desperation to it too. Something pathetic and needy that he’ll hate himself for later, but he can’t help it. He just wants…

But it doesn’t matter, because Ivan looks away. Like it’s nothing. Like *Till* is nothing.

Io is saying something, but Till doesn’t hear it past the roaring in his ears. All he can focus on is Ivan sitting there and eating his dinner like Till isn’t actively crying.

Till shoves back from the table so fast his chair scrapes against the floor. His breath is sharp, ragged, but he won’t let himself cry here. He won’t. He won’t give Ivan the satisfaction – if he even cares enough to feel satisfied at this point.

“I’m not hungry,” Till mutters, voice wrecked, blinking rapidly like that’ll somehow stop the flood of tears. It doesn’t, and Io calls out to him, but Till is already gone, furiously scrubbing the wetness from his eyes as he bolts to his room.

“What the fuck,” he breathes, tugging at his hair once the door is safely shut behind him. “What the *fuck.*”

There was a time in Till’s life where he’d expect a reaction like that from Ivan. That didn’t make it hurt any less, but at least it wasn’t a surprise, not like this.

Back when Till was younger, during the years Ivan ignored him, he imagined an imaginary box surrounding Ivan. A box with a door and lock, and everyone had the key to go inside – everyone except for Till.

To this day, he doesn’t know what he did to deserve it. But he does know one thing: Ivan’s love is conditional, and Till doesn’t know what that condition is. It’s only a matter of time before he’s thrown away again.

The cold, empty stares. Ivan’s expressionless face, not angry, not disappointed, but a worse secret third thing: apathetic.

“Get it together,” Till mutters to himself, sniffling. He manages to calm down marginally by the time Io knocks on his door, asking to come in.

It’s kind of ironic, really, that Till is crying into his mom’s shoulder again just like he did last week when Mizi rejected him. But it’s Ivan’s fault this time, and it’s a thousand times worse.

“I hate him,” Till mutters into her shirt. “I hate him so, so fucking much. He’s such an asshole.”

Io makes a soft noise and continues to stroke his back. “You don’t mean that, Till.”

Till doesn’t, and admitting it makes everything hurt more. “I didn’t mean to make him so mad. One day he’s fine, and now he won’t even fucking look at me, and he’s acting like he used to, and –”

He’s getting worked up again. Fuck.

Io shushes him, pressing a kiss to his hair. “I know, sweetheart. He still loves you, but Ivan’s always been… complicated. You know how he is more than anyone.”

Yeah. A freak, Till thinks.

“Ivan’s been so stressed lately,” Io continues, “looking for scholarships, thinking about university, carrying the guilt of leaving us behind if he goes out of state. He tries *so* hard to take care of us, and he’s only seventeen. It’s a lot on his shoulders, but he never lets me help.”

Even Io sounds choked up now, and Till instinctively holds her tighter. Fuck, when did she get so *small?*

She’s right, though. Ivan has a lot on his plate right now. And on top of everything, he had to deal with the stress of Till disappearing. No wonder he freaked out like he did. Ivan reached his breaking point.

Till is completely caught off guard. He realizes that he's been a fucking idiot. He had no idea Ivan was shouldering all of this. It never even *occurred* to him. Fuck.

Guilt washes over Till, making his breath stutter. "Doesn't… Doesn't Ivan open up to you?"

Io laughs tearfully. "No, he never complains. He loves us both so much. He'd shoulder the weight of the world if we asked him to."

Till swallows hard, mouth dry. Ivan didn't even go to his senior homecoming last month. He was too busy preparing and studying for the ACT and SAT. He must have been exhausted, completely wrung dry, but he never said a word. Just kept pushing forward alone. And now he has to lead Anakt to victory tomorrow during the semi-final game.

Ivan is so fucking annoying. No one asked him to do any of this. It's that stupid martyr complex of his. Till kind of wants to strangle him, while another part wants to shove his tongue down Ivan's throat. Damn these stupid teenage hormones. They always act up whenever Ivan is involved.

Till must have taken too long to reply, because Io smiles sadly and pulls away. "If you need some time alone to think about things…"

And just like that, something in Till's chest caves in. Before he can stop it, he's crying again.

"Mom," he chokes out, barely above a whisper. His hands fist into the fabric of her shirt, like if he lets go, he might fall apart completely. "I think I'm gay."

Io's eyebrows raise momentarily, but then she smiles and hushes him, holding him close. She strokes his hair until he doesn't feel like he's moments from breaking apart anymore. If the world goes to shit, if Ivan leaves and ignores Till for the rest of his life, then at least he still has his mom. He always will.

"Oh, Till…" Io's voice is so soft, so full of love, and Till melts into her arms. "Thank you for telling me. You know I'll love you no matter what."

Somehow, that just makes Till feel worse, because the guy he's gay for is Ivan. The stepson she's been raising for years. She has no idea, and Till feels so *guilty.* She didn't do anything wrong, so why did Till and Ivan end up like this?

She deserves so much better. Deserves the world, actually, but all Till can do right now is hold her close and ignore the guilt that's threatening to break him to pieces.

"I love you too," Till whispers into her shoulder. He doesn't say it as much as it should. He wonders if Ivan doesn't, either.

"You're going to apologize to your brother today," is what Io says to Till when he stumbles downstairs, still half-asleep Friday morning.

Till pauses mid-motion in the act of scratching his stomach. "What?"

Io frowns. She's already dressed for work – soft pink scrubs and plain white tennis shoes, so she's probably got a busy day ahead of her. Till watches her move about the kitchen, reaching into the fridge to set out his lunch pack. Then, she searches through the cupboard to pass him a granola bar and banana before she continues.

"An apology," Io says again, leaning her hip against the counter. "You haven't given him one yet, have you?"

Till swallows thickly. It's insane how easily she can see right through him. "No, but he's never..."

His words trail off. Fuck, where was he even going with that? Ivan *did* ask for an apology the night Till had disappeared, and Till had –

"And me?" Ivan asks. "Do I get an apology too?"

"Is that, like, a trick question?" Till asks fuzzily.

Till was such an unbelievable asshole. The memory is so infuriating, he wants to jump back in time and punch himself in the face. He almost wishes Ivan had, because it would have probably hurt a lot less than this entire ordeal.

Io presses a kiss to Till's cheek. "It's hard, but I know you can do it."

Till nods miserably. "Where is he, anyway?"

"Oh, he left early to jog the track before school." Io squeezes Till's arm and steps away to grab something. Suddenly, she thrusts Ivan's lunch bag into his hands. "Here, I have just what you need – an excuse to talk to him. He was out of the door before I could make him something."

Till stares at the bag in his hands like it's a live grenade, and it may as well be. He really, really does not want to talk to Ivan right now. Ivan's always been the one to bridge the gap and smooth things over between them, at least for the past year or so.

If Till is being completely honest, a part of him is worried that Ivan won't forgive him, and he doesn't want to hurt himself by trying.

But the guilt is gnawing at him, and his mom is never wrong about anything, so maybe Ivan's lunch bag is the metaphorical olive branch Till needs right now. Just to make things normal again. At least, as normal as things can be when it involves a freak like Ivan.

"Alright," Till says awkwardly.

"Now, eat your breakfast and get dressed, buster." Io offers him a bright, kickass smile. "You've got places to be."

Till still feels awful, but that does make him smile. Fuck, he loves his mom so much. He needs to get his shit together, but only for her sake. Definitely not for Ivan's.

Io leaves after kissing his cheek and wishing him good luck. He appreciates the gesture, but he still doesn't know if Ivan is even going to give him the time of day.

Honestly, he'd be better off dressing like the emo twinks from the porn Ivan watches. There's no way he could ignore Till if he looks like his favorite pornstar.

Wait. That's… not a bad idea.

Till is over this entire situation. After eating half of the banana and polishing off the granola bar, he climbs the stairs to get dressed, already scheming.

Ivan is a freak, which works out in Till's favor, because he has a Plan. One that will probably earn him a dress code violation, but what else is new. It's for a good cause.

Till is officially done moping and feeling sorry for himself. It's just not in his nature. He's a rebel with anger management issues, and he's going to fucking act like it. He'll make it impossible for Ivan to ignore him, because Till is a terror, and if he's going to get Ivan's attention, then he needs to appeal to the freak's tastes.

The plan is actually pretty simple: Till will dress like a femboy, force Ivan to snap, and then they'll blow off some steam in the boy's restroom together.

Afterward, Ivan will be stress-free before his big game tonight. It's humiliating, but Ivan's a freak, and Till has to pull out all the stops. He'll die if Ivan ignores him for even one more day.

So, he digs through his closet to find the perfect outfit. He grins when his fingers land on a pair of scandalously short black shorts he'd mistakenly bought while thrift shopping. It had been mixed up with a pair of baggy cargo pants, and now it's about to serve a much greater purpose.

First, Till puts the shorts on, pairing it with a tight black tank top and layering a long-sleeved mesh shirt under it. He slides his arm warmers on next, followed by a pair of ripped black thigh-highs, and finally, his favorite black choker.

Till doesn't have a lot of sexy shoe options. In the end, his choices boil down to sneakers or combat boots. After some deliberation, he settles on a pair of simple black Converse he'd doodled all over in a fit of boredom.

After he's dressed, Till hastily applies some eyeliner. He's rushing now, and it ends up more smudged than usual, but it's probably working in his favor right now. He doesn't bother fixing it. It's adding to the aesthetic – the kind of look that screams rebellion.

Aka, Ivan's wet dream.

When he's finally done, Till steps back and stares at his reflection in the full-length mirror on his door. He looks a thousand times better than those poser emo twinks from the gay porn Ivan watches. He definitely isn't going to make a habit out of dressing like this – not willingly, at least – but from an objective standpoint?

To any gay or questioning dude, Till looks fucking irresistible right now.

Good. That's… good, Till thinks. Maybe. Ivan better be fucking grateful and start groveling at his feet, because Till is really throwing his pride out the window here. He grabs Ivan's lunch, then finally starts walking to school.

It's warm today. Till lucked out considering how fucking exposed he is. He doesn't feel bold enough to pull a look like this off, but that's part of the charm, isn't it?

Ivan doesn't have a thing for confident people, because why would he have a crush on Till?

As much as it sucks to admit, Till isn't exactly a shining beacon of confidence. He's sixteen, alright? No one is at this age. Except for Ivan, who's probably a psychopath, so it doesn't even count.

Besides, the freak must have a thing for Till's lack of composure. Which is annoying, and he'll definitely punch Ivan about it someday, but now it's working in his favor, so whatever. He can let it go just this *once.*

Till passes the school, trudging up the sidewalk toward the football field and track. He can count on one hand the number of times he's willingly entered its vicinity – once, the gym teacher found Till smoking by the bleachers and forced him to jog a mile as punishment, and Till literally almost died.

Maybe he needs to exercise more, because he's already out of breath just from *walking.* Till decides that Ivan cannot be human. Who the hell wakes up early to exercise before high school of all things? A stupid muscular jock alien in disguise, probably.

The track is empty when Till finally arrives. Well, empty save for a single person jogging laps in the golden morning light.

Till stops by the wire fence. He'd know those broad shoulders anywhere, especially now that he's fantasized about scratching them up while Ivan fucks him into the bed.

Ivan is still rounding the far bend of the track, so Till can't make out very much from the distance. Ivan doesn't notice him at first, and Till's tempted to just leave the lunch bag on the bleachers and bolt to safety. But that would defeat the whole fucking point of walking all this way, so he stays rooted to the spot.

Ivan eventually slows to a stop. He's panting hard, the warmth of his breath fogging in the air. He pauses to wipe the sweat from his brow with his shirt, momentarily baring his prominent abs. And it's pathetic how Till's mouth fills with drool at the sight. His knees feel weak.

Ivan's gaze finally lands on Till. His eyes widen almost comically. For a moment, they just stare at each other, and a knot of anxiety twists Till's stomach to shreds. Embarrassed, he self-consciously adjusts the shorts, trying to make them appear longer.

Ivan closes the distance. The only thing separating them is the wire fence, but it feels like a brick wall.

“Till,” he acknowledges.

Acknowledges. His eyes don’t light up like they normally would, and there’s no snaggletooth smile on his face. There’s no smile at all, actually. And Till is wearing *booty shorts*.

Fuck, Till hates this. All of this is so wrong. Ivan is supposed to say something like, oh, Till, what a pleasant surprise. Fancy meeting you here. Would you care to run a lap with me? And Till would be tempted to kick him in the shin, because Ivan’s true goal would be getting Till sweaty and gross, because he’s a freak who probably wants to lap up Till’s sweat like –

Focus, Till tells himself. He can do this.

Till’s heart is racing in his chest, but he ignores it, trying for something calm and casual. “You forgot your lunch,” he says flatly. He unslings Ivan’s lunch bag from his shoulder and holds it over the fence.

Ivan takes the bag from Till, and their fingers briefly touch. It’s pathetic, but a tingle shoots down his spine, and he rips his hand away like he’s been burned. Ivan notices his strange reaction, but he doesn’t comment.

“Thank you,” Ivan says, already turning to leave. He sounds strange. “Have a nice day at school, Till.” And then he stops, as if he genuinely can’t help himself. “And please put on a pair of pants.”

Till can only watch as Ivan walks away to gather his things further down the track. He stares at Ivan’s retreating back until he enters the building with the locker rooms and showers, and then Till has a very, very slight breakdown.

Ivan fucking left after seeing his biggest wet dream dressed like an emo femboy. Till is wearing booty shorts, and Ivan vacantly stared at him before walking away. It’s not the reaction Till wanted, but he doesn’t care. He’ll *make* Ivan react. He refuses to lose.

And you know what? He had been on the precipice of chickening out and running home before anyone could see him dressed like this, and now?

Now, Till is fucking committing.

To Till’s absolute furious embarrassment, he’s catcalled five times before the day is even half over.

One of the worst offenders is someone on the football team who won’t leave him the fuck alone. Till very briefly considers slamming his locker shut on the guy’s fingers, but he can’t do detention today. So, he settles for flipping him off instead.

“Don’t be like that,” the guy says, pouting. So fucking ugly, Till thinks. Nothing like Ivan’s pout, which makes his snaggletooth dig into his bottom lip like a disgusting dog. “At least

give me your number. I didn't know you were hot, dude."

"One more word," Till breathes, eyes narrowed, "and I'm breaking your nose. Your choice, asshole."

The stupid jock sizes him up, but he must decide it isn't worth it. In the end, he shrugs and turns away. Smart choice. "Fuck, whatever. I'll just ask Ivan later."

Till has to bite down on his cheek to suppress a laugh. Serves Ivan right for all the years girls have pestered Till for his number. And then he wonders if it'll make Ivan jealous, which would be fucking hilarious, so –

"You do that," Till says flippantly. It probably makes him a bad person, but he never said he was a good one, so fuck it.

If you asked Till whether he liked sharing a lunch period with Ivan a week ago, he probably would have scoffed. Him, enjoying Ivan's company? Yeah fucking right.

And yet. And *yet*, he can't help his disappointment when he walks into the cafeteria. Ivan isn't at his usual table, and Till grumbles under his breath as he eats.

A few people try talking to him, which he takes as well as you'd expect, but the period thankfully ends before he gets fed up and actually punches someone in the face.

So, ceramics. It always comes back to fucking ceramics, doesn't it? Till is starting to think the art room is cursed or has some vendetta against him, because everything always goes to shit whenever he's there.

Ivan is actually in class today. Till walks in expecting to see Ivan's chair empty again, and his eyes widen when he finally musters the courage to look.

Ivan is seated at their usual table with a textbook open – AP Literature, Till thinks – and he's dutifully writing notes down, which is annoying. He always stares at the door like an eager dog, waiting for Till to walk in so he can annoy him.

Not today, apparently. But that isn't a problem, because Till is wearing thigh-highs and shorts. There's no way Ivan can keep his eyes off him. Not for the entire period at least. It's like a law of freak nature. A symptom of Ivanism.

Till casually rounds the table and takes his usual seat next to Ivan. And yeah, his heart does sink a little when Ivan doesn't even bother with a simple *hello*, but it's whatever. He can still salvage this.

The word seductive and the name Till don't belong in the same sentence. Till would be the first to admit that. Seduction requires confidence and experience, and he isn't exactly – never mind. You get the point. Still, that doesn't mean he's completely clueless. He's watched porn too. It's not rocket science.

Feigning innocence, Till adjusts one of his thigh-highs, stretching out his long, slender leg. And if he just so happens to nudge his foot against Ivan's calf under the table, then you know, accidents happen.

"Oops," Till says, not meaning it in the slightest.

Predictably, Ivan tenses up. His eyes are still glued to his homework, but he's clearly affected. Till doesn't even try to hide the fact that he's gleefully watching Ivan sweat, especially when he doesn't stop. He continues to 'accidentally' rub his foot against Ivan, pretending like his thigh-high needs constant adjusting.

Finally, Ivan levels him with a stare. And it's so fucking funny that his pupils are visibly dilated just from Till's one-sided game of footsies. He's so, so pathetic.

"Till."

Till plays it cool, but it takes every ounce of control in his body not to grin. "What?"

Ivan's fingers tighten around his pen. He exhales softly through his nose, closes his eyes, and then returns to his homework. "Nothing."

Till raises his eyebrows. *Nothing*, Ivan says. Till is basically molesting Ivan with his foot under the table, and that's nothing? This is the guy who pays to watch twinks that look like his stepbrother get pounded by ten-inch dicks.

The lukewarm reaction is annoying. And then Till realizes that Ivan's probably used to shit like this from him. Like the thigh thing last week. Or the hair thing the week before.

How long has Till been torturing Ivan? Groping him on the couch, cuddling him when they got sushi earlier this week, forcing him to sleep in bed with him last Saturday.

Till's been doing this shit for years without realizing. Ivan's a fucking veteran at weathering his unintentional flirtatious gestures. He's, like, built up an immunity.

Holy shit. He thought Ivan had no self-control at all, but he was wrong. Ivan is a *saint.* He's probably not even half hard right now.

Obviously, this isn't working.

Eventually, Till just gives up. The awkward vibe grates on his nerves. A few minutes pass until the art teacher starts grading individual projects, calling each student up to her desk.

Till suddenly remembers that he's going to be given his first F in an art class today, and his mood turns from bad to worse. He sulks for all of ten minutes before he finally explodes.

"Are you seriously going to fucking ignore me when we're sitting right next to each other?"

Ivan doesn't look up, and his pen continues to scritch across the paper. "I'm not ignoring you, Till. That would be petty and immature."

Till is starting to get genuinely upset. “Oh yeah? I asked you to pass the salt yesterday at dinner, and you didn’t even – even *say* anything, Ivan.”

“I handed you the salt, as is customary when someone asks,” Ivan replies.

“Yeah, but you didn’t say some shit like, ‘here, Till, let me salt that for you’ or ‘oh, according to my statistics, your salt intake is higher than yesterday, so you should –”

“Till.” Ivan levels him with a flat stare. His eyes don’t leave Till’s face, like it’s safer that way. “I’m trying to work on this very important assignment. Let’s talk later.”

Till’s mouth parts open with surprise. And doesn’t *that* response just take him right the fuck back to the years Ivan spent ignoring him, weird and distant, barely even acknowledging him once a week except when one of them snapped and beat the shit out of the other, and — and Till can’t do it again. He just can’t.

Back when Till was kid, he cried and threw a temper tantrum at least three times a day. At sixteen years old, nothing has changed; the first few tears slip down his cheeks, going *drip drip drip* as they land on the table.

Ivan stiffens, and his pen halts mid-word. For a second, he doesn’t react, like if he stays really still this moment won’t be happening again. But it is happening, because Till is crying – what else is new – right in the middle of ceramics.

Till doesn’t even bother wiping the tears away. He just glares at the table with his jaw clenched. His shoulders are hunched inward, and he balls his hands into fists. He’s just so fucking *done* with this.

“Till,” Ivan says softly.

Till doesn’t respond. He’s pretty sure his voice would crack anyways, so it’s for the best.

Ivan hesitates, setting his stupid pen down. He shifts in his seat just enough that their knees brush when he turns to face Till. It’s not much, but it’s – it’s *something.* And for some shitty reason, it makes Till tear up more.

“Till,” Ivan says again. He leans in, voice dropping low like Till is some startled woodland creature instead of a guy who’s considering punching him in the face. “Please… don’t cry.”

Till finally moves. His head snaps up, eyes red-rimmed and teary as his makeup runs down his face. “Fuck you,” he spits, voice thick and wounded. “*Fuck you. You* made me cry, asshole.”

Ivan grimaces. He doesn’t even argue, because there’s no defense here. He did. He opens his mouth to say something, but he’s interrupted when the art teacher calls his name, ready to grade his project.

He doesn’t know that it’s not his project she’s grading, but the one Till made. He did it for Ivan. All of this was for Ivan.

Is Ivan even going to be grateful? Till genuinely doesn't know anymore. It doesn't even feel like he knows Ivan himself anymore, and maybe that's what hurts the most.

Till doesn't even look at Ivan as he gathers his things, stands up, and bolts from the room while scrubbing the tears from his eyes, ignoring the teacher's sharp call of his name.

She doesn't follow him. It's just high school teenage drama to her, nothing worth stopping class over. Another emotional outburst from Till – temperamental, reckless, dramatic Till. Nothing's new, so why does this suck so much?

Because he likes Ivan. Like, actually *likes* him. Maybe he has for a long time. He can't even remember why he cared about Mizi's rejection last week. That was nothing to this.

Till's out of the school building the moment the bell rings. He doesn't even want to see Ivan anymore, not when it hurts this much. He just wants things to be *normal*, but Till fucked up, and he doesn't know how to fix this. An apology, maybe, but he still doesn't understand why Ivan would care so much.

Whatever. Till is officially at his limit. He texts his mom that he'll be at the skatepark today, planning on smoking pot until he forgets what existing feels like. But then she reminds him of the semi-finals tonight, and for as much as he complains, Till has never missed one of Ivan's games.

There's a first for everything. Till turns off his phone, stops home to change out of this stupid, useless outfit, and then grabs his skateboard before Ivan shows up.

The skate park is more lively than it was Wednesday. It's a pretty hot hangout spot for delinquents and losers, so Till fits right in.

He does his usual routine. He warms up on the mini-ramp, then skates the half-pipe until he's too tired to continue. Afterward, he settles against the wire fence with a few teenagers his age, even letting one of the girl's fix his smeared makeup.

A week ago, he'd probably be sweating *so* hard with a girl's hand on his face, and now he barely even flinches. It doesn't escape her notice, and she blinks slowly.

"Are you gay?"

"Dunno," Till replies, shrugging. "Maybe. I think I have a thing for my stepbrother."

"Huh." She pops her bubblegum and reaches into her crossbody purse to pull out a bowl, a bag of weed, and a lighter. "That's cool. Is he hot?"

"Yeah," Till says, and he doesn't even feel weird admitting it. Ivan being hot is just a fact of life now. Like, is the sky blue? Is water wet? Is Ivan hot? Categorically yes to all of those questions. "I want to punch him in his stupid, perfect face, but he's probably into that."

Weed girl laughs. "Kinky. You should record it for me." She sets everything up, takes a deep hit, and offers the bowl to him after exhaling. "Wanna' smoke?"

Till stares at her hand for a long moment. He instinctively goes to accept, but something makes him hesitate just as he's about to grab it. Distantly, he admires her bright yellow nail polish, the kind of bold color he'd never wear. She seems so cool, and Till would have been crushing hard if Ivan didn't poison his brain and turn him gay.

Ivan would be upset if he smoked again. Not because he's controlling, but because he *cares.*

And just like that, Till knows what he has to do.

"No thanks," Till says, standing up and brushing the grass from his ripped jeans. For some reason, he feels calm. Calmer than he has in a long, long time. "I'm going to go kiss my freak stepbrother until he stops being mad at me."

"Wow. I love the confidence." Weed girl gives him a dorky thumbs up. "Go gottem, tiger. Me and my bowl will be here if things go south."

That's actually really nice of her to say. Weirdly comforting. If all of this goes to shit, if Ivan ends up rejecting him, the world will still turn. Weed girl will still be here smoking a bowl, and Io will offer to watch a movie with him to cheer him up, and Ivan –

Ivan's leaving for college soon anyway. If there was ever a time to confess, then it'd be during the middle of his stupid football game, and when has Till ever missed an opportunity to be dramatic?

"Thanks," Till says, offering her a rare, genuine smile.

Anakt is losing hard when Till finally shows up, sneaking over the fence to avoid paying the student admission fee. He searches the stands and breathes a sigh of relief when he sees Io up there, but there's a worried look on her face, and Till doesn't even think before he climbs the stands to ask her what's wrong.

"Till!" Io's expression brightens when she sees him, and she pulls him into a fierce hug. "Oh, I'm so glad you showed up. *Please* go talk to your brother, Coach is so upset, and the game is –"

"Wait, what?" Till asks, confused. "What's going on?"

"It's Ivan," Io explains, a little breathless as she gesticulates wildly with her hand. Ah. Till was wondering where he got that quirk from. "He refused to play. He was sitting on the sidelines, and we didn't have a good quarterback to fill the position, so Coach put Dewey in."

"He refused to play?" Till repeats incredulously. Sociable, accommodating, responsible Ivan? Holy shit. But also, "Fucking *Dewey?* That's the best we had?"

"Yes," Io breathes, like he's finally, *finally* getting it. Even with the patience of a saint, she isn't immune to Till being Till. "He's so upset. He called you at least fifty times after school, but you must have turned your phone off, and then he wanted to go find you and apologize, but his team wouldn't let him."

The theatrics of the exchange is earning them looks, which kind of makes sense. Ivan is throwing the game for *everyone*, and it's partially Till's fault. He can feel more than a few glares burning a hole through the back of his head right now, but he actually couldn't fucking care less.

This whole situation is insane. It feels like Till's acting out the dramatic climax in a coming of age movie. Fuck, why does he have to be the protagonist?

"Jesus," Till says, with feeling.

Io nods empathically. "He told me what you did for him in ceramics. Oh, Till. He feels so awful about everything, please, please go talk to him. I've never seen him do something like this."

Ivan's first act of rebellion. Till did that. He incited Ivan to rebel. But of all fucking times…

"I will," Till promises, squeezing her shoulder. "Where is he?"

"Locker room," Io replies, nodding toward the building in the distance. "Coach didn't even want to look at him anymore."

What a dick. Instead of rallying Ivan to improve his mood, he just sends him away? Not that it would have helped anything, but still. Anakt is doomed once Ivan graduates and isn't team captain anymore.

Till receives a lot of glares on his walk toward the locker room, but he doesn't pay it any attention. He's on a mission. He's got a stupid freak jock to kiss.

Just this morning, he felt meek and confused, and now he's buzzing with confidence. He knows what needs to be done, and it's going to involve a lot of saliva and tongue. Hopefully, Ivan will reciprocate.

Adrenaline courses through Till's veins. He throws the locker room door open, walks inside, and sees Ivan hunkered down on a bench, staring at the floor with a flat expression. Eyes glazed, inky hair falling into his face, and he doesn't even bother to look up. Doesn't expect for a second that it's Till's footsteps approaching him.

It's fucking unbearable.

Till stops in front of the bench. Ivan furrows his eyebrows when he recognizes Till's shoes, but he doesn't have an opportunity to question it.

"Till," Ivan begins, eyes wide when he finally looks up. "What –"

He never finishes that sentence, because Till interrupts him.

Till grabs Ivan by the collar of his jersey, knuckles bleeding white from the force of his grip, and tugs him forward to crash their lips together in a clumsy, painful, sloppy first kiss.

Their teeth clack together. Till hardly feels it, because Ivan's lips are so *soft.* Ivan makes a startled, high-pitched noise into Till's mouth, gasping like he can't quite believe this is happening, and Till just tangles a hand into his hair and laughs against his lips, kissing him deeper.

Ivan's mouth is slack. He's so shocked that he can't even manage to reciprocate, but Till can tell he wants it. Wants *him.*

And then Ivan's groans shakily. He grabs Till's face with both hands to hold him steady and *devours* his lips.

Ivan kisses Till back like he's starving. His grip is tight, almost desperate and painful, and it sends a wild, fluttery thrill down Till's spine. Their mouths slot together messily, all tongue and no finesse, just pure unfiltered need.

Till moans into the kiss, feeling Ivan's hands move from his face to his waist, gripping his hips like he's afraid Till might disappear if he doesn't hold on tight enough. The fact that Ivan is *kissing* him is so surreal.

Ivan. His freak stepbrother. And they're making out in the locker room just like that stupid porno. What was it, again? Emo twink stepbrother rides jock? Something like that.

It's hard to think when Ivan's snaggletooth is digging into his bottom lip and drawing blood, making him wince even as a bolt of heat shoots down his spine and pools low in his stomach.

Till fists his hands in Ivan's jersey, dragging him closer, needing more, needing everything Ivan can give. Without realizing, he climbs into Ivan's lap, pressing their bodies together. The heat between them is almost unbearable. Intoxicating.

Ivan kisses like he's making up for lost time, like he's been holding back for years. And maybe he has.

When they break apart for air, Till is a wreck. His lips are swollen and red, and he pants against Ivan's mouth, letting out these little whimpery hoarse gasps that he'll be embarrassed about later.

Ivan looks just as wrecked. Eyes dark, pupils blown wide, lips glistening. He stares at Till like he can't believe what just happened.

Till licks his lips, heart thundering in his ears. There are a million things he's thinking about saying to Ivan right now, and not one of them matter in the end, because his mouth moves on its own.

"I'm sorry," he murmurs, voice shot. Finally, *finally* apologizing. He should have done this the night he'd disappeared, and he swallows thickly, resting his forehead against Ivan's. "For scaring you that day. I'm sorry."

No excuses, no bullshit. Ivan deserves so much more than what Till has been giving him. An apology is a good place to start.

Ivan's breath hitches. His fingers are digging into Till's hips, and he doesn't seem to realize his own strength. His eyebrows furrow, his expression crumples, and he buries his face into Till's shoulder and exhales shakily. Then, he lets it out.

"I kept telling myself you weren't dead," Ivan begins, and Till's heart shatters into a million fucking pieces. "You sneak out all the time. You were only missing for a few hours. You always forget your phone. You can defend yourself. But in the end, I couldn't…"

Ivan laughs hoarsely, but the sound is devoid of humor. It's the worst thing Till has ever heard. So deprecating, so scornful and sharp, like Ivan truly can't stand himself.

"I have no trouble lying to other people, but I can never lie to myself. You really could have been dead. The odds were so low it wasn't even worth considering, but I couldn't reason with myself. Isn't that pathetic? I've had so many people die in my life, Till. Please…" Ivan's voice cracks. Actually, genuinely cracks with emotion as he whispers – no, *begs* into Till's shirt, "Please don't be one of them. Not before me."

Till realizes, with startling and sudden clarity, that Ivan is *traumatized* from the amount of death he's witnessed in life. Who wouldn't be? Ivan is human. He loves so fiercely, it becomes an obsession.

Till didn't know. Ivan never said, but when has he ever?

In retrospect, of course Ivan would be terrified of losing Till and Io. They're all he has left. Till isn't just Ivan's crush; he's his brother, too.

He's been so fucking ignorant. Ivan's always been an obsessive freak in almost every possible way, but Till never thought to look deeper. Never even thought to ask why. But now he knows, and he's going to do better. For Ivan's sake, his own sake, and his mom's too.

"You're such an idiot," Till mutters, combing his fingers through Ivan's hair. Fuck, they have so much to talk about, and he really wants to kiss Ivan again, but they're still in the middle of the locker room where anyone could see them.

Also, the football game. That's pretty important too.

"I am," Ivan agrees easily, leaning into Till's touch like a big, affectionate cat. Then, because he's still fucking Ivan, "You really are terrible at kissing, though. We should do it again with more tongue and saliva this time. As your older brother, I'll help you practice. But I do have to warn you: it may take several sessions considering your complete lack of skill and finesse."

Jesus. Till can't stand him. "Stop lying, freak. You just want a mouthful of my spit."

"Yes," Ivan breathes instantly. "If you're offering."

"I'm not," Till says flatly.

Ivan nods like he expected that answer. "It was worth a try."

Till stares at him. Ivan stares back.

“You’re not being as mean as you usually are in my dreams,” Ivan notes after a long, awkward pause, frowning. “Odd. You’ve usually broken my nose at this point. Should I try copping a feel of your ass? That usually riles you up.”

Till can’t fucking believe this. And no, the thought of Ivan groping his ass isn’t making him breathless. How often does this pervert dream about feeling Till up? Fuck, he doesn’t want to know.

“You’re not dreaming, and I’m not going to – to fucking punch you, dude. What?”

…

“I’m not dreaming,” Ivan says slowly, eyebrows furrowed.

“Uh.” Something about Ivan’s expression is giving Till pause. It’s weird. *He’s* weird. “No? I mean. I’m pretty sure I’m real, Ivan.”

“Ah.” Ivan is quiet for a long moment, and then he offers Till a strained smile, squeezing his hips before patting them absentmindedly. “I think I’m going to throw up. It’s cute that you’ve climbed into my lap, but I would really rather not vomit on you. Could I trouble you to move?”

“What the fuck?” Till asks, heart sinking. He’s probably wilting like a sad little flower, though he’d never admit it. He ducks his head and gazes up at Ivan through his eyelashes. “Was… the kiss that bad?”

He thought it was nice. Messy, sure, and more than a little painful, but nice. Cathartic. His lip is still bleeding from when Ivan’s snaggletooth nicked him. If anyone should be throwing up, it’s Till.

Ivan’s smile tightens. “Not at all. I’ll be playing it on loop in my head for the rest of my life, short as it may be.”

Till genuinely cannot understand this freak. Despite the sheer absurdity of this situation, he somehow manages to form a coherent sentence.

“First off, you’re growing old with me, so don’t even think about biting the dust before we get, like, liver spots or something. I’m fucking serious, Ivan. Wrinkles. Memory problems. Weak bladders. If I have to go through that shit one day, so do you.”

“Okay,” Ivan agrees hollowly.

“Secondly, what the fuck are you talking about? Are you sick?”

“No. Well, some would say I’m sick in the head, but physically, I’m at peak performance. My heart did stop for a moment when you grabbed the collar of my jersey and kissed me, but I think that was a hormonal thing. At least, I hope so.” Ivan looks up at him empathically. “Am I allowed to vomit the contents of my stomach into the nearest toilet now?”

He's insane. He never makes any fucking sense. Till takes a deep breath, then exhales slowly. He can do this. He can be patient and understanding. It might kill him, but he has to try.

"Why are you feeling sick?" Till asks calmly. It still sounds accusatory, but he's *trying*.

Ivan blinks like Till just asked the most ridiculous question ever. "I've wanted you from the moment I first saw you, Till. I can still remember every detail from the day we met. The faded color of your shirt, and the dirt on your nose when we were introduced. Your big forehead that you've only recently grown into. And do you know what my father said? You were going to be my brother. *My* brother, *my* Till."

Till's jaw drops.

And Ivan just continues, "From the moment our eyes met, you became the reason for my existence. I love everything about you, Till. Even the part that resents me for distancing myself from you."

Till is, for once in his life, utterly speechless.

Because what the fuck. Honestly.

He's spent years bickering with Ivan, pushing him away, telling himself that Ivan only likes annoying him because that's just what Ivan does. But this? This is a whole new perspective.

"You're everything, Till," Ivan says. "*Everything.*"

"I –" Till starts, and then stops.

There's so much to unpack here. The obsession, the possessiveness, but the most important thing is that Ivan knows —

"I don't resent you. I never did," Tills says, annoyed. "You're my *brother,* Ivan. Stop putting words in my fucking mouth, or I really am going to punch you in the face."

"You don't like me," Ivan retorts, subtly trying to shift Till away. "You don't like men."

Ivan's face is looking more punchable by the second, but Till refrains. "I started watching gay porn because of you, dumbass."

"What?" Ivan asks, instantly leaning forward with an intense gaze. "What kind? Amateur or professional? Were you more interested in watching the top or the bottom?"

"Shut the fuck up," Till hisses, blushing to the roots of his hair. "That's not the point."

Ivan has a glazed look in his eyes, and his breath leaves him in a soft, shaky exhale. "It was the bottom, wasn't it?"

"I – I don't know, freak! I guess?"

Ivan doesn't respond.

“It seemed… fun,” Till continues, tone hushed and eyes glued to the far wall. It feels like a confession. “To take it, I mean. To be good and let someone else take control and use me until –”

Ivan presses his forehead to Till’s shoulder and laughs hoarsely. “Till,” he begins heavily, “please, *please* stop talking.”

“You’re the one who fucking asked,” Till huffs, rolling his eyes. It’s not his fault that Ivan didn’t like his answer. Still, he continues to card his fingers through Ivan’s hair, enjoying the bristly texture of his undercut at the base of his skull. “But wanting a dick up my ass obviously makes me gay, Ivan. Even I know that.”

Ivan makes a small, wounded noise, burying his face deeper into Till’s shoulder. “I’m going to die.”

“No, you’re not.”

“My heart is pounding at a hundred and fifty beats per minute.”

And people say *Till* is dramatic. “No, it’s not.”

To prove his point, Till presses two fingers to the throbbing skin beside Ivan’s jugular, and then his eyes widen. Holy shit.

“Holy shit,” he breathes, frantically patting Ivan’s back in a way that is probably neither soothing, gentle, nor comforting. “Ivan, calm down. It’s, uh, going to be okay. I’m here.”

Ivan whines softly, still hiding in Till’s shoulder. “You don’t like me the way I like you.”

“Yeah, no fucking shit. I’m not insane,” Till replies, still awkwardly patting his back. “But I like you like a normal person. And… isn’t that enough?”

Ivan pulls back to stare at Till’s face. His mouth opens and closes. “Is that enough,” he ends up repeating, incredulous.

“Are you having a stroke,” Till asks.

“Yes, I think I am this time,” Ivan confirms, dragging a hand down his face. “And now you’ve kissed me, and you’re sitting in my lap, and I don’t know what to do with myself.” He lets out a breathless, strangled laugh, looking up at Till helplessly. “I can feel my brain short-circuiting, and my body is shutting down as a failsafe.”

Till should be freaked out. He *is* freaked out, but he’s spent years building up an immunity to Ivan’s specific brand of crazy. He opens his mouth to speak, but a sudden roaring cheer from the game outside interrupts him, and then he remembers what he came in here for in the first place.

The fucking football game. The one that Anakt is losing spectacularly.

“Okay,” Till says with finality. “Okay. Here’s what needs to happen. Ivan.”

Ivan blinks to attention, still dazed. “Yes.”

“I need you to lock in. Anakt is 3-20 right now.”

“That makes sense. Did they put Dewey in?” Ivan asks conversationally.

“What? I mean, yeah, but how did you –”

“Horrible decision. Dewey is a terrible quarterback.”

“Okay.”

“You can get away with that in junior high, but in our division, that won’t work.”

“Alright, dude. Anyway –”

“He can’t run the ball,” Ivan says, continuing to be a fucking freak. “He doesn’t have the ability to adapt and think quickly, which is required to avoid being tackled.”

Till squints at him. “I didn’t ask.” And then, because he can’t help himself, “What the fuck did Dewey do to you, anyway?”

Ivan offers him one of his slimy smiles. “He wanted your number. It was bound to happen with the way you were dressed today, but it did sour my opinion of him quite a bit.”

Holy shit. That *was* Dewey hitting on him earlier today, wasn’t it? He really did have the audacity to ask Ivan for Till’s number.

“Forget about fucking Dewey,” Till hisses and grabs Ivan’s face, squishing his cheeks together between his forefinger and thumb. “Listen to me, freak. You’re going to go out there and play the best game of your fucking life, got it?”

Ivan nods mutely, eyes wide.

“And you’re gonna carry Anakt to the finals so the entire fucking school doesn’t end up hating us,” Till continues. “And if you don’t win, I’ll…” Where the fuck was Till going with this, again? “I won’t kiss you again tonight.”

It’s an empty threat, but Ivan falls for it hook, line, and sinker.

“I’ll win,” Ivan says immediately, scarily intense. “How much should I score? Should I play dirty? I don’t want to tear anyone’s ACL, but if it means more physical affection from you, then –”

Till heaves a sigh, slapping a palm over his mouth before he can finish that sentence. “Just fucking win, Ivan. You’re… a really good quarterback. You don’t need to play dirty.”

Ivan stares at him. Malfunctioning just like that time in ceramics. Critical system failure. Then, he breaks.

“One more kiss,” Ivan begs, panting like a salivating dog. “For the road. To remind me what I’m fighting for. You’re so cute. Please, Till, even a peck on the cheek would be enough.”

Oh, whatever. Till grabs Ivan by his hair and kisses him to shut him up. It’s not a good kiss, but it burns with intensity, and they chase each other’s lips when Till finally pulls away.

“There.” Till releases Ivan’s hair and stands, relieved that his half-chub isn’t visibly tenting in his tight jeans. Ivan would probably jump him if he knew Till was hard. “Now get out there and win this stupid football game, loser. I’m so over this shit.”

Till leaves before Ivan can stop him and beg for more kisses. Just in time too, because it’s already halftime. He can hear the marching band warming up, and he sticks to the shadows as the football team enters the locker room.

For some reason, Till feels like he’s walking on air, like a great weight has suddenly been lifted from his shoulders. Sure, he’s still gay for his freak stepbrother, but Ivan isn’t mad at him anymore, and that’s all that really matters.

He grabs two sodas from the concession stand, then finds his mom in the bleachers. She still looks pretty miserable, but she brightens when she sees Till approach.

“Till! How’d it go? Did you talk to him?”

“Yeah,” Till replies, passing her a can of soda. It’s not as cold as it was last week, but he still huddles close to her. Once a momma’s boy, always a momma’s boy. He’ll proudly admit. “The freak’s going to play after halftime. Just needed some, uh… motivation.”

Io smiles. “I’m glad he’s choosing to play, but I was really asking if you made up.”

Till blinks, caught midmotion in the action of cracking open his soda tab. The image of Ivan’s red, bitten mouth flashes in his mind, and he ducks his head to hide his blush. “We still need to talk about a lot of shit, but… he’s not mad at me anymore, so it’s whatever.”

“Oh, I’m so relieved. What an awful couple of days.”

Till sighs with her, leaning back to the gaze at the clear, dark sky above. A few dredges of glowing light lick across the horizon, but the sun has pretty much set at this point. “Yeah, fucking ditto.”

“Language,” Io chides fondly. Then she frowns, reaching over to grab Till by his chin. “Till, look here for a moment.”

Till swallows. “W-What?”

“Your lip…” Io brushes her thumb over the sore spot where Ivan’s snaggletooth dug in. “What happened? That looks deep.”

Till’s heart stops. He always, *always* loses his cool when he’s flustered – the ceramics incident, for example – but this situation is next level. The only excuse he has also happens to be the lamest thing that’s ever left his mouth, but it’s all he’s got.

“I… busted it while skateboarding earlier.”

Io’s teal eyes swim with warmth and amusement as she finally lets him go. “You can tell me if you were kissing somebody. I’m happy for you. Just remember to use protection if you ever, uhm. You know. Oh! I think Ivan still has that box I bought him a few months ago… You could borrow a few. Unless he… used… Oh, dear. And the sizes might be… Maybe I should just give you the money, and you can get whatever you need.”

“Mom,” Till begs. His face is on fire, and he genuinely feels dizzy. But also, how come she preemptively bought Ivan a box of condoms and not Till? Is Till’s game so obviously bad even his mom has noticed? Then again, he pretty much tells her everything, so she would know if he ever… Wait.

Ivan better not have used a single fucking condom in that stupid box, or Till will kill him.

“Let’s change the subject,” Io says over the marching band, and Till nods frantically. Best fucking idea ever. “I used to play the flute in high school.”

Till smiles, imagining his mom with a flute in her dainty hands. He didn’t know that. “The flute?”

“And the piccolo,” she confirms. “I wanted to play the tuba, too.”

They talk about music until the marching band is finished, and then the football team is back on the field. They both hold their breath as they search for a familiar jersey number. For a long moment, they can’t find him. But there, right there, Till sees him just as the announcer notices too.

“The star quarterback, jersey number twelve, is back on the field after sitting out for the first two quarters!”

Till breathes a sigh of relief. Io cheers and claps until the third quarter begins. They can still win this. *Ivan* can still win this.

By the end of the fourth quarter, both teams are tied 27-27.

Till has no idea what the fuck is happening because he’s never paid attention to football, like, ever, but they’re apparently going into an overtime period. Everyone is at the edge of their seats, Till included, and Anakt has the ball. All they have to do is score.

And that’s just what Ivan does.

Till is not a sports person. He’s never tried to be, but even he can admit that it’s objectively one of the most awe-inspiring moments of his life to watch Ivan – his stepbrother, his Ivan – suddenly run the ball, slipping through the defense.

A player tries to tackle him, but Ivan does this elusive split-second twirl that has the guy jumping at nothing, and it’s almost like Ivan is *baiting* the guy. Playing with him.

Ivan speeds down the field, hugging the sideline as he gains yard after yard. It's like Till is watching the scene in slow motion. The crowd is roaring, and the enemy team is hot on Ivan's tail, but he's faster. Smarter.

They genuinely stand no chance.

Just like that, Ivan crosses the goal line into the end zone, scoring a touchdown.

Till doesn't remember when he started standing and cheering, but it's only after he watches Ivan's teammates surround him that he realizes. Embarrassed, he falls back to the bench, hiding his red face behind the lip of his soda can. Judging by the fond look Io is giving him, he isn't exactly successful.

"Ivan's probably going to be a while," she says once the cheers die down and the teams leave the field. "Do you want a ride home? I'm going to get everything set up for game night."

Oh, fuck. There's something wrong with Till, because he's actually *excited* for game night for once. He considers the question, then shakes his head. There's most likely going to be an insane party that Ivan's team will try to force him to go to, so it's up to Till to save him. Again.

"Nah. I'll ride home with the freak. Someone has to stick around and make sure he doesn't get dragged off to a basement party."

Io smiles, thanks him for looking out for his brother, and kisses his cheek before she leaves. Till gets up and lingers by the locker room, waiting for Ivan to finish showering and celebrating with his team.

Till leans against the brick wall, stuffing his icy hands into his hoodie pocket while gazing at the sky above for lack of anything better to do. He nervously taps his foot, and a nonsensical part of him itches for a cigarette to ease his nerves. A few people leave, but there's no sign of Ivan. Of fucking course.

Ivan is surrounded by people when he finally walks out, hair wet and skin damp. No one but Till would notice the way his eyes are darting around, and his face very briefly falls when he can't find who he's looking for.

So, Till steps out of the shadows. He'd usually avoid Ivan like the plague with his jock friends practically hanging off his arm, but he's feeling bold tonight.

"Hey, freak," Till says, smiling.

Ivan stops walking, almost causing someone to walk straight into his back. He turns around to offer an insincere apology, then walks over, effectively cementing what the most important thing is to him right now: Till, and not his stupid team.

"Till," Ivan greets brightly with a smile full of snaggletooth. "I thought you left with Io."

"Pfft." He's so pathetic and needy. Till is overwhelmed with the urge to grab him by his damp hair and kiss him senseless. "And let some cheerleader wearing a pound of makeup guilt trip

you into going to a stupid party? Yeah right."

"Maybe I was considering experimenting with ecstasy," Ivan replies conversationally as they begin walking toward the student parking lot. He's trying to seem casual, but Till can tell that he's practically vibrating out of his skin with excitement right now. Such a fucking loser.

Till laughs quietly. "You've got other things to experiment with tonight, freak."

Ivan's eyes widen, and he stops in his tracks. "Till," he begins, audibly breathless, "are you saying…?"

Some of Till's bravado crumbles, but he tries to keep a straight face. "I-I mean –"

Ivan doesn't even let him fucking finish before he shakes his head, laughing under his breath. "No, of course not. Sorry. Just kissing is fine. More than fine."

Till goes quiet, trying to think of something to say. It's crazy that the cool dude who just scored one of the craziest touchdowns their division has ever seen is also being so supremely lame right now, but… Till kind of likes it. A side of Ivan only he gets to see.

"You should spit in my mouth," Ivan blurts, then frowns. "That's not what I mean to say."

What the fuck. Every time Till thinks something nice about this freak, he has to ruin it. "What did you even mean to say, dude?"

"I don't know," Ivan confesses once they reach his car. They both settle inside, and Till buckles his seatbelt before Ivan asks. Ivan must notice, but he doesn't comment. "My intention was something romantic, I think, but then you licked your lips and my thoughts derailed. Understandable, but far from ideal when my goal is to stop myself from scaring you away."

"That's all it took?" Till asks dubiously. He didn't even realize he was doing that. "Me licking my lips?"

"Licking your lips is a subconscious sign that you're anticipating a kiss," Ivan explains. "It can also mean you're nervous about initiating one."

"My lips are chapped, Ivan."

"I know. I can moisten them for you."

"What the fuck?"

"With my own saliva," Ivan finishes. "My lips are, ah, never chapped, so maybe my saliva has special lubricating properties. On that note –"

Till tries to reach over and slap a hand over Ivan's mouth before he can say something embarrassing, but he just ends up banging his knee against the console. "Fuck –"

“Should I stop and pick up a bottle of lube?” Ivan continues anyway, snaggletooth protruding over his bottom lip around a smile. “I don’t mean to presume anything, but your body language is very desperate right now, Till. I’d like to be prepared for any possibility that can lead to your hand making contact with my penis, preferably with proper lubrication, but if you’d like to chafe me, then I’ll gladly accept that too.”

Till leans his head back against the seat and covers his blushing face with his hands. “I’m going to fucking strangle you.”

Ivan’s breath stutters out, pupils blown wide. “Promise?”

“Not in a sexy way,” Till says. “I’m gonna’, like, shove my fingers down your throat.”

Ivan swallows, nodding along. “Uh huh.”

“A-And block off your airway until your eyes start rolling up.”

“That sounds horrible. I’d really hate it if you did that,” Ivan supplies, pulling out of the parking lot. “And then what?”

“Then I’ll…” It takes Till a moment to realize that Ivan’s eyes are wide and gleeful, like Till threatening to choke him is the best thing that’s ever happened to him. And to the freak? It probably is. “Jesus. I can’t fucking stand you. Get away from me.”

“I could, if that’s what you really want,” Ivan begins lightly, “but I think we both know you don’t mean that, Till.”

Till rolls his eyes. “I can’t believe I fucking waited for you. I should’ve left the minute the game was over, and now I’m stuck in this stupid car while you –”

Ivan smiles. “While I what? Speak the truth? Express my boundless appreciation for you? Desire you in a way that is, admittedly, bordering on unsettling?”

“You need a filter. Better yet, a fucking muzzle.”

Ivan hums thoughtfully. “I think I’d prefer a collar.”

Till takes a deep, calming breath. “What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“Many things, but I feel like you’d rather kiss me again than listen to me psychoanalyze myself.”

God, he really is the worst. And Till is about to let him get away with it. It’s so over for him.

“… Shut up and drive, freak,” he mutters.

Ivan just laughs. “Whatever you say, Till.”

Till can’t believe he missed this. A week ago, Ivan was his freak stepbrother. The fucking catalyst of Till seeing him as something more was gay porn of all things. Most people would

run away if they discovered something like that on their stepbrother's computer. And Till?

Till must be as insane as Ivan, because he ended up running *toward* the freak. But as he admires the handsome profile of Ivan's face, he really can't bring himself to regret it.

They can figure shit out as they go. That's what they've always done, and it's gotten them this far.

In the end, Till loves Ivan too. That's all that matters.

Chapter End Notes

there are 106 instances of the word fuck in this chapter, which makes up about .8% of the total word count. just fyi.

deletion note

why am i deleting my fics?: thank users @carnalcore and @tubulartoes on twitter for harassing me (calling me a “predator” and “pedophile” for writing underage fiction).

however, the reason i’m deleting all of my accounts is the fear of being stalked. at a certain point, they had privately quoted my tweet 35 times after i’d posted about their behavior, then continued to do so to my followers or anyone who posted about me at all, which genuinely freaked me out. as someone who was a victim of stalking before, i’m not taking any chances.

will i ever return?: absolutely not. i have never experienced a more obnoxious fandom in my life.

what about my works?: they will eventually be deleted. i will be un-privating them for a day so people can download them, and then they’ll be gone. i know my work means a lot to many people, and i want to give you all a chance to enjoy my fics after i leave.

can i share your fics?: yes, in private dms, but do NOT repost my fics. not on ao3, twitter, etc. that’s all i ask.

my works will be deleted on wednesday, so save them now.

to those of you who would like to follow me into another fandom, i apologize. i don’t think i’ll be posting or writing fanfic anymore. after 15 long years of writing, i’m calling it quits. it’s become increasingly obvious to me that fandom is not what it used to be, and if nothing else, i’m grateful to the alien stage fandom for making me realize that.

to everyone who supported me or enjoyed my works, thank you. will miss you guys. take care, everyone. 🖤 -Raventia

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!